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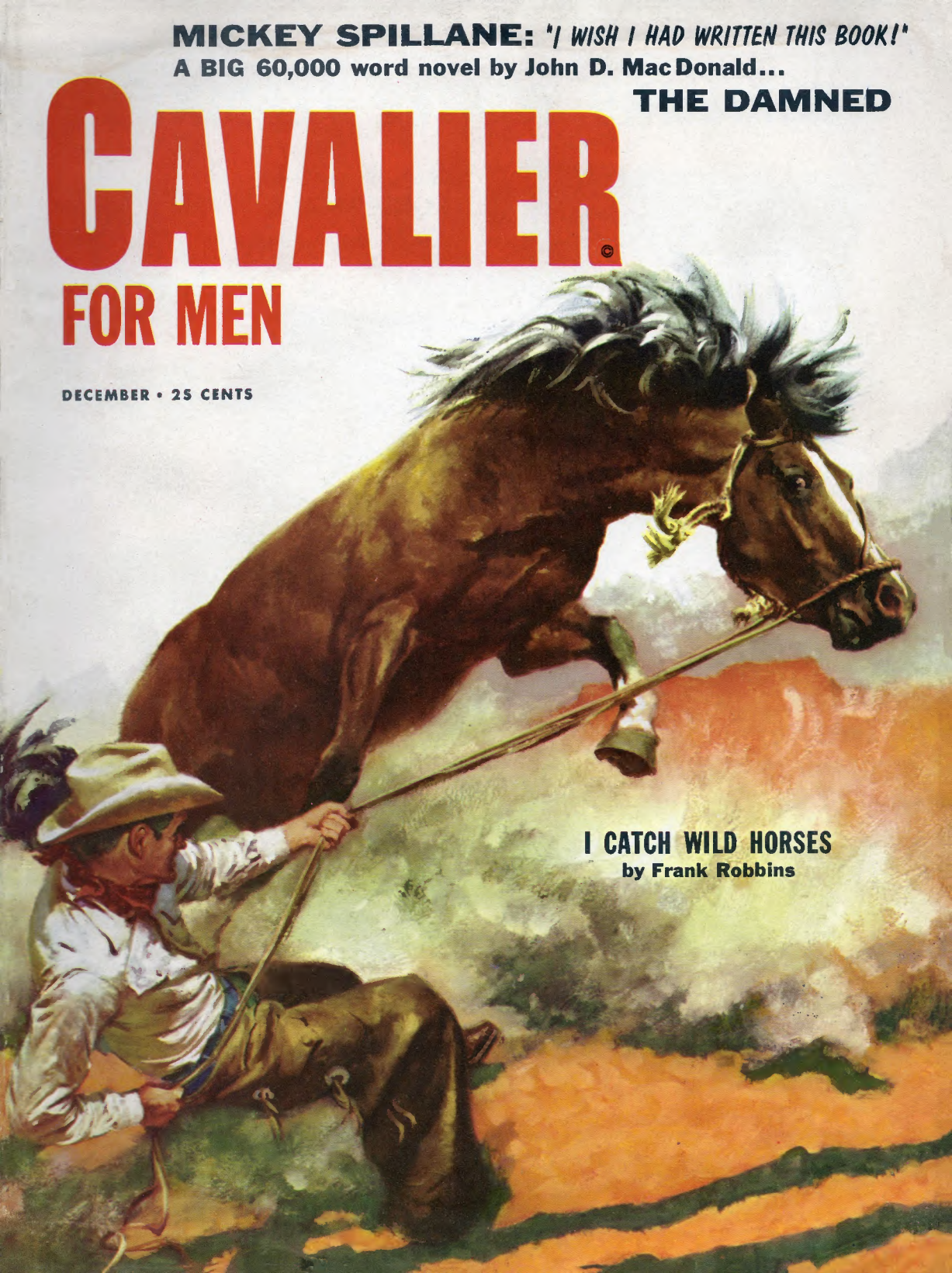

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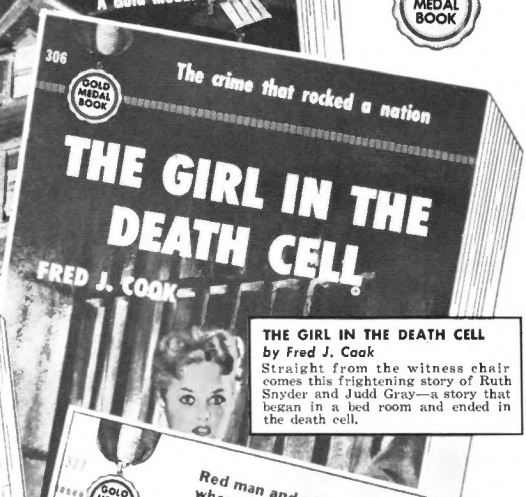

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The Damned • by John D. MacDonald

MICKEY SPILLANE says:
"I Wish I Had Written This Book!"

VOL. 1 NO. 9

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Many times each day this scene is repeated somewhere in the United States and as the winners cross the finish line, thousands of people win or lose millions of dollars.

You'll find the calmest citizens at any track in the handicappers' box. Here at Belmont Park Mike Lee (far right), Lou O'Neil (wearing dark coat), Jerry de Nonno (behind O'Neil), and Tony Betts (standing) wait for the next race.

Can You Win with the Handicappers?

Here's the lowdown on the tipsters' records, their "systems," their "inside dope"—and your chances of making money on their selections

by Martin L. Gross

Last year American racing fans confidently and willingly bet over $5,000,000,000 on the knowledge of a handful of men—the men who make up that select and special society of professional racing writers known as handicappers.

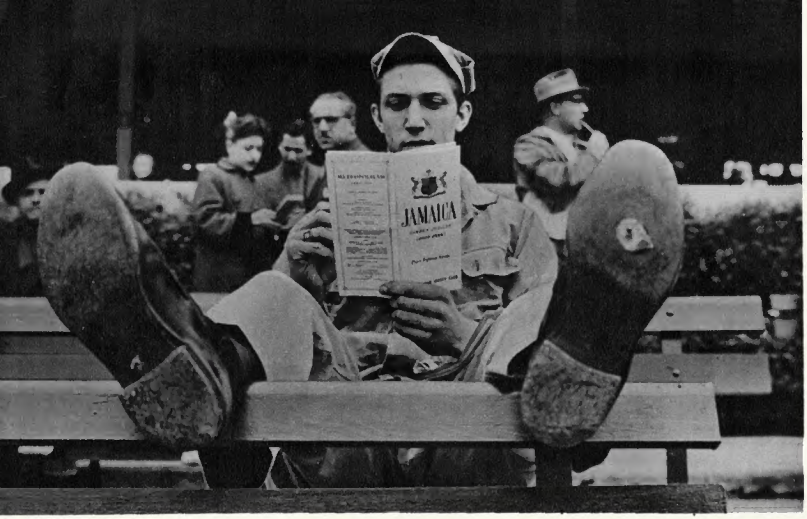
While there are still those amateurs who swear by the old Lillian Russell system—sticking a hatpin through the eye of the horse on the program cover—more than 90 per cent of the country's bettors dutifully go along with the selections of the men who are supposed to know. So while these fans say, in referring to a race, that they are betting on such and such a horse, actually they are betting on the ability of their favorite handicappers.

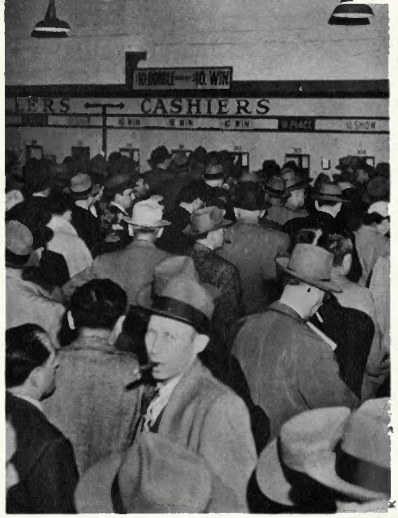
Yet, for all the influence that the handicappers have on the bettors, very few of the fans who put the dough on the line know anything about them. Ask a racing fan the great horses of all time and he'll rattle off the names—Man O'War, Sea Biscuit, Assault, War Admiral and the others. But ask him about the handicappers, how they operate and why they deserve even two bucks worth of faith—and you'll get a blank stare.

To find the real dope behind the handicappers, we went right to the handicappers themselves. The first picker we interviewed was Mike Lee, Sports Editor of the *Long Island Daily Press*. In addition to acting as handicapper for his suburban paper and the *New York Daily News*, Mike covers the races for the Associated Press.

The way we put the problem to Mike was, "If you bet the way the experts pick 'em, can you build a bankroll?"

"The usual test is the flat rate profit," he answered. "You bet a mythical two dollars on every selection to win and check the profit or loss that way. I've had a flat rate profit for full meets—Aqueduct in fifty-two, Saratoga the same year, and at Jamaica in the fall of fifty-one, but neither I nor anybody else I ever heard about has made a flat rate profit for a full year. I think, when you consider that up to 17 per cent of the betting pool is taken out by the different states and the tracks, it's pretty near impossible for a public





The nonchalant guy with the hole in his shoe, the occasional plungers at the $5 window, and the serious bettors who practi

handicapper picking every race to buck that kind of odds."

Mike is the kind of public handicapper known as a "figurator." To him, every horse from the "selling platter" in a cheap claiming race (a horse that can automatically be bought for the price of the winning purse) right up to Native Dancer, is merely a number—a figure he arrives at quite scientifically, and a figure he uses to grade the horses before each race.

"I give a horse 200 points plus or minus. I keep a complete file of every horse running in New York or Florida and whenever a new thoroughbred comes in from, say California, I get his past performance record out of the *Morning Telegraph* or *Racing Form* and add it to my file.

"My system is based on speed and weight. The faster the horse has run before the more points he gets. I take one point off for each fifth of a second (one full length of a horse) less than the track record, and one point off for each added pound of weight the horse will have to carry in the race."

Various systems of thoroughbred mathematics form the basis of much of handicapping, but such factors as morning workout times, muddy track, a "name" jockey, or an "overlay," can throw the most careful figuring out the window.

"An overlay," Mike explained, is a horse that comes into a race at about six to one because he has been overlooked by the betting public. Actually, he would still look like a good bet at two to one to the handicapper. I had one like that a while back. Belton Boy, who's now a big favorite, was squeezed out by a few horses in one of his first races at Belmont, and he lost badly. The next time he came up, he was figured no good and the odds were high. I saw him run, though, and I remembered that block. This was a classic case of an overlay, the odds were too high for a horse of his caliber. I picked him to win, and sure enough, the next time he broke through and paid twelve dollars and thirty cents for two bucks."

Of all the terms connected with handicappers, the "hot tip" is probably the most misunderstood. Most handicappers do have contact with a few owners, trainers, jockeys and clockers. Occasionally, information from the fellows who sleep with the horses does pay off, but most handicappers consider tips to be unreliable. As one prominent horse writer said, "If you ask any ten trainers if their nag looks good, eight will tell you he's going to win. That's not what I consider a reliable tip."

While a public handicapper who has to make 24 selections a day at five or six different tracks could hardly rely on tips like that, one member of the fraternity has built the gimmick of so-called inside information into a multi-million dollar operation.

Ken Kling, whose droll cartoon strip, Joe and Asbestos, with accompanying horse selections written in Klingian code, appears in some 20 newspapers from coast to coast, is undoubtedly the master dealer of the "hot tip."

Ken's two famous cartoon characters amuse innocent tots who read Joe and Ashestos in the *New Orleans Item*, the *Toronto Evening Telegram*, the *Miami Daily News* and 17 other journals, but to the grown-ups who know, his little coded notations are good for more than laughs. For fifty cents sent to Ken in care of your local newspaper, you receive a copy of the Joe and Asbestos Sport Weekly. This paper contains about six pages of expendable sports information, but most of Kling's 75,000 readers discard these pages and turn right to the enclosed code key to that week's selections.

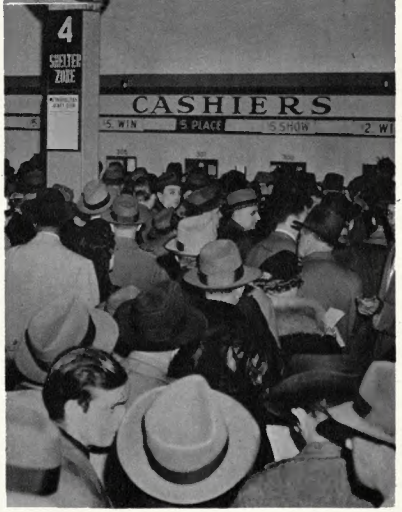
Armed with this key, the little line "PLUM 48-79-82 at Lincoln Fields" suddenly becomes transformed into "Put ten bucks on Lulu Baby in the fourth to place."

Although his bank deposits can certify that he is an accomplished handicapper, Ken is not a full-fledged public picker. He is what the trade would call a "spot picker"—he chooses only one or two horses out of a card of eight races, and these are generally the safest bets of the day. But to his credit, he handles some dozen different tracks a day (all his columns have local information) and he claims that his mythical starting bankroll of $20 has never shown a loss any year since he started business for the *Baltimore Sun* back in 1926.

"I never use figures," Ken boasts. "I have four clockers on my payroll timing the speed of horses on their morning workouts and they wire me quick news on 'live' horses. I know hundreds of jockeys and trainers and I call some of them everyday for inside information. I pay exercise boys for tips and I occasionally like to send gifts to the jockeys and trainers."

The comment that handicappers have become so influential that they actually set the odds on races, bears up especially well in the case of Ken. The people who spend the half dollar for his code book don't do it just for the pictures of Joe and Asbestos, and when a pony picked by Ken comes up on the tote board as a 10 to 1 shot, it quickly drops to 5 to 1 when all the Kling money is thrown on it. Ken estimates that his followers back him to the tune of $3,000,000 bet a day!

Handicappers fall into three major categories: those who



cally climb over the rail in their anxiety to root their favorites home are all influenced by the predictions of the handicappers.

work for individual daily newspapers; men employed by the three large wire services, and the handicappers on the two major trade papers of the racing field.

Most daily newspapers in racing cities such as Miami, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and others, have their own full-time men handicapping the local tracks. Such pickers as Rip Newborn in Cleveland, Gabby Haugh of Baltimore, Maurice Bernard of San Francisco, George Kriebel of Detroit, Joe Thomas in Lexington, Kentucky, and Jerry Sullivan in Boston are among those who send the bettor to the track with a little more knowledge about the nags than he had before.

In New York City, the horse lovers' paradise that boasts three regular tracks and two trotting raceways, about two dozen men handle the handicapping for the daily newspapers. In addition to such prominent figurators as Ortell of the *World-Telegram*, Keats of the *Mirror*, Lynch of the *Journal-American*, and others, the New York dailies employ a number of men who operate under such pen names as ZEV, PDQ, Flasher Frank, Sec, and Don Carlos. PDQ, for example, a free-lance turf analyst for the *New York Daily News* and a few other papers in the hinterland, is actually Frank Greenfelder, an old-time horse follower.

Horse players unfortunate enough to live in cities where the newspapers can't or won't support a handicapper receive their selections via the wires of the giant news services. The three men who work for the Associated Press, United Press, and the International News Service probably reach more bettors than anyone else in the business.

Matty Satosk, a 27-year-veteran of the business, has been the anonymous handicapper behind the Associated Press byline for the last few years, and his daily selections appear in more than 100 daily newspapers from coast to coast under the title, "AP Selections."

The other two wire service men, Joe Gelardi of the International News Service and Ray Ayres, the "ghost" at the United Press, appear in hundreds of papers in the states and are even picked up in Canada. Gelardi, who has become the golden boy of the harness racing fans in New York, uses his own name and often receives special requests from newspapers.

Not long ago, when a new daily paper in Hot Springs, Arkansas decided to publish selections for Oaklawn, a small half-mile local track, they wired Gelardi to do the job. He took it on, and seated in his New York office with index cards of all the nags entered at Oaklawn, picked selections for a track 1800 miles away to be printed in a newspaper just a few minutes' drive from the track!

Newspaper handicappers have become necessary parts of the sport for most horse players, but to a select group of veteran plungers, there are only two publications—the *Daily Racing Form* and the *Morning Telegraph*, the racing bibles published by Triangle Publications, Inc. Their combined circulation (including the eight separate editions of the Form stretching from Winnipeg to Mexico City) never exceeds 250,000. But if you've ever seen a dedicated bettor trying to analyze the biography and past performance of a nag, you were probably surprised that anyone, let alone 250,000 people, could decipher the horse code of the racing papers.

A sample line from an edition, describing a previous race of Ram O' War, a three-year-old chestnut colt descendant of Man O' War, reads as follows:

2My53-7CD fst1¼47⅘1.12⅘2.02 KyD'rby 3 9 11^{11} 10^{11} 9^{11}› 9^{13}DD'dson wb 126 85.10 82-9 Dark Star126^{h} Native Dancer126^{5} Invigorator126^{2} Far back

Translating this maze is considered one of the fundamentals of successful handicapping. When interpreted into English, the line says:

On May 2, 1953, during the 7th race at Churchill Downs, Ram O' War, on a fast track, ran the distance of a mile and a quarter in 2 minutes and 2 seconds, covering the fractional distance in 47⅘ seconds and 1 minute 12⅘ seconds. The race was the Kentucky Derby and starting from post position 3, Ram O' War was successively in 9th, 11th, 10th, 9th place and finally finished 9th, fifteen lengths behind. The jockey, Mr. D. Dodson, carried a whip, and the horse, carrying 126 pounds on him, wore blinkers. The odds on him were $85.10 to each dollar wagered. His speed rating was 82 and his track variant 9 as compiled by experts on the Telegraph. Dark Star, carrying 126 pounds, won the race, beating Native Dancer by a head. The Dancer, in turn, beat Invigorator by five lengths. The trouble with Ram O' War, finishing so poorly among eleven starters, was just that he was too "far back."

The men who spend a good part of their lives translating these strange figures into good selections are two "handicapper's handicappers" known as Hermis and Sweep to the racing world.

Al Udcoff and Jim Watts, the men behind these distinguished pen names, are probably the most important—and most unusual—handicappers in the business. First of all, they're known as office handicappers. While most pickers are out at the track watching their favorites and supposedly picking up valuable tips, these two veterans are cooped up in Triangle offices at 525 W. 52nd [*Continued on page 48*]

COLDEST JOB ON EARTH

When the five pounds of dynamite being rammed in the frozen bog explodes, resulting shock waves are recorded. The way they travel through the earth tells geologists the odds of finding oil.

In Alberta's frozen wastelands, "Keep your mouth shut buddy," is a password, not an invitation for a fight. This was one of the first things I learned in the muskeg oil country, because a careless deep breath can mean seared lungs and an invitation to pneumonia.

Three winters ago, as oil gushed from the twin fields of Leduc and Redwater in central Alberta, U. S. and Canadian oil companies rushed prospecting crews north to hastily set-up camps in the trackless winter wilderness where the mercury sometimes plunges to 70 below. Their goal: to chart the huge, untapped petroleum reserves which the best brains in petroleum geology believe lie hidden beneath northern Canada's Arctic wastelands.

To most of the oil prospectors working the Alberta area, "muskeg" had been only a word in the dictionary, roughly defined as a floating morass of peat moss and decaying vegetation. But by the end of their first winter, some crewmen had coined some highly personal definitions. For from the start, the muskeg conspired to drive them out.

During that first winter of 1949, the temperature more than once dropped to 62 below. For days on end the mercury hovered between 40 and 50 below while razor-edged winds swept over the flatland wilderness, slicing through men's parkas and two suits of woolen underwear. It froze the moisture in men's nostrils, solidified breath and splotched faces white with frostbite. But the cold wasn't the only enemy.

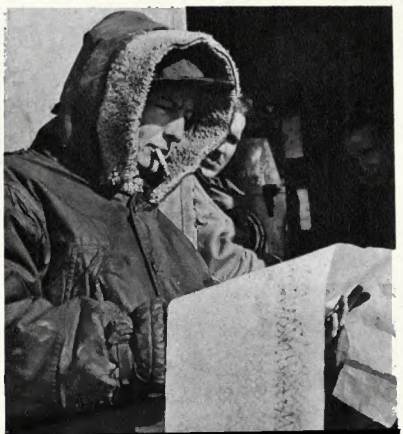
Occasionally soft spots in the muskeg opened and swallowed bulldozers whole.

There were still other dangers. One night a dozer operator was nosing over some trees. Suddenly, as the

Hooded against the cold, the author wears glasses to avoid snow-blindness.

A rugged dozer driver shows a king-sized fish he caught in frozen river.

Young crew chief, Bob Shaller, reads sine waves that result from blast.



At 70 below, men's eyeballs freeze in minutes, tools become burning steel, one deep breath causes pneumonia, yet men go about their work

by James Joseph

blade nudged a foot-thick spruce made brittle by the cold, the tree snapped off, hurtled over the blade and pinned the driver to the seat. Next morning crewmen found him. He looked like a hunk of meat on a spit.

A bearded oil prospector in his mid-twenties was reminiscing about that fateful first winter as we stood beside a camp shack. The thermometer on the shack's door was shattered. "Happened one night when it hit 72 below," the seismologist said. And then he added off-handedly, "This operation is routine."

The psychology of this understatement, ingrained after a winter or so in Canada's bush, is probably one reason why oilmen have licked the muskeg at its own game.

If the exploring companies have found oil, or even a good indication, they don't publicize it; nor do they publicize the dangers involved in looking for it.

Last February a dozer driver was shuffling through the Arctic night to his tractor. He carried a couple of sandwiches inside his parka in a vain attempt to prevent the bread from freezing. As he approached the dozer, he cursed his luck at having pulled the 11 hour night shift. And that night it was going to be plenty rough. The thermometer already read 48 below. Suddenly, the driver was conscious of padding paws and a sniffling behind him. He glanced around cautiously and was startled to see five grey wolves trotting at his heels like tame dogs. The catskinner yanked a heavy mechanic's wrench from his pocket and clubbed the nearest animal. There was a shriek and the others fled. Without stopping to see about his marksmanship, the driver beat it back to the tarpaper shacks.

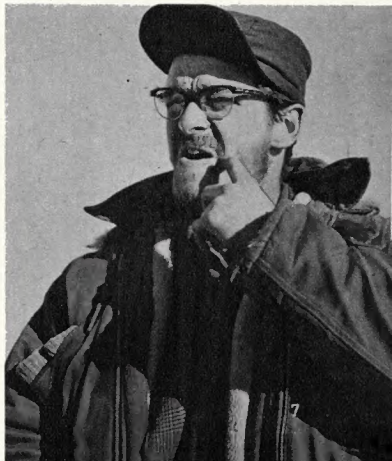
Next morning they found the frozen body of a huge

From the roof of a snowmobile, an oil crew man gives the blast signal. A second later the frozen bog lifts a couple of inches, and the modern mechanisms of oil detection begin functioning.

An oil crew man cautiously unloads a box of dynamite from snowmobile.

A seismologist plants an electric "ear" that picks up the blast shock waves.

Many young muskeg oilmen grow heavy beards to protect them against the cold.



The muskeg wilderness is a lonely place, so whenever the supply plane shows up the men welcome it with open arms.

Tracked vehicles are the only ones that can work safely in the muskeg. Even these sometimes sink out of sight

Trees like this one sometimes crystallize with the cold. One snapped off and impaled the driver of a bulldozer.

wolf not 20 feet from where the dozer had been parked. The animal's skull was neatly bashed in.

Perhaps the muskeg's worst trait is its downright treacherousness. A man lays aside his gloves for a moment and picks up a wrench bare-handed. The cold metal sears like dry-ice and the wrench peels off a chunk of skin as it slips from his grasp. Some guy carelessly lifts a tin cup to his lips—and it sticks. He has to wait until someone warms the cup with a torch or he risks losing a slice of his lip. Stinging winds bring tears to a man's eyes. But before he can wipe them away, they've frozen to his cheeks.

According to the books, muskeg freezes solid in winter. But bush crews have long since chucked out the written word of "experts," and rely instead on experience. Frequently snow flurries settle over the boggy mass of peat before the freeze-up and insulate the lower layers, preventing them from freezing. As winter presses down, a white camouflage of new snow cleverly conceals the soft spots. An unsuspecting bulldozer rumbles over the surface. It sinks. The arctic muskegs are dotted with bulldozer graves.

This winter, one of our dozer operators tracked his machine three times over a survey line. Even though experience had taught him better, he tried a fourth pass. Suddenly his 10-ton machine lost traction and began to sink. The driver jumped clear and watched helplessly as the tractor disappeared below the surface. Only hissing steam from the still-hot engine marked its snowy demise. Crews got to work immediately. They probed with long sticks. They tried blasting. Finally they radioed for help and a drag-line was rushed north from Peace River, Alberta, 300 miles away. After an hour's search the dozer was located at a depth of 30 feet, and apparently still sinking. We wrote off the machine as a "muskeg loss."

When spring break-up approaches, we hurriedly pack up our camps and get out while the getting's good. For one day each year, the Provincial government announces, "All vehicles over 3,000 pounds gross weight prohibited on Alberta roads." If seismographic crews aren't already treking down the gravel-rutted MacKenzie highway—the only access road into the muskeg—they're trapped until the thaw is over. And by that time the once frozen mass is a vast bog which will scarcely support a man's weight, much less a heavy truck or tractor. So equipment must often be dragged to higher ground and abandoned for the summer, while the crews trudge through miles of quicksand-like morass to the highway.

One party, stranded for six weeks by last spring's break-up, ran out of food. The camp's cook, with an eye on the empty pot, equipped the party's four native Indians with slingshots and sent them rabbit hunting. This was old stuff to the Slavey Indians who have somehow survived the muskegs by judiciously trapping in winter and holing up on high ground during the summer. For three weeks crewmen subsisted on an unvarying menu of rabbit stew for breakfast, sauteed rabbit for lunch, and fried rabbit for supper. Finally a plane dropped rations.

Recently I caught a muskeg cook feeding garbage to a covey of wild bunnies. I noticed a calculating gleam in his eyes. "I'm fattening these little bastards up," he explained, "we're goin' have fat rabbits this spring. None of those skinny, starved devils like last year." Actually, field crews are lavished with the kind of food most of us wish we could afford. One camp of 25 men recently laid in a six-weeks' grub supply that cost $2,000 wholesale.

Not all muskeg misadventures have happy Hollywood endings. Late one night, 26-year-old William J. Elder, a Canadian geologist, was driving back to his Arctic camp. His car skidded on a bull-dozed road and stalled in a snowbank near the shores of Lac La Biche. Elder tried desperately to start the motor, but the 40 below weather had weakened the battery. If he'd stayed with the car, he'd probably have frozen by morning, so he decided to set out and walk toward some lights shining on the lake's distant

shore. He'd covered 10 of the 14 miles when he dropped, exhausted. Next day the Royal Mounted Police discovered his car, trailed his faltering footprints across the snow-blanketed ice and found the body. Statistically, Elder was a "muskeg loss."

There are some wild stories which tell of oilmen who've frozen their eyeballs during a two-minute walk from their skid-mounted shacks to a kerosene-heated privy. "I've never heard of it happening that fast," one of the old hands said, "usually takes about fifteen minutes."

Last January, Bob Shaller, 28-year-old chief of party for the Geophysical Service, Inc., and a native of Golden, Colorado, pulled on his parka and crunched through the powdery snow to a one-way landing strip on the edge of camp. A company plane was just landing and Shaller wanted to talk with its pilot. En route he met the camp's cook. Shaller glanced at the cook and exclaimed, "Hey, Joe! Your nose is frozen!" The cook yanked off a mitten and began thawing his nose. Suddenly he stopped, took a long gander in Shaller's direction, and shouted, "So's yours!"

While seismographic crewmen are usually weather-wise after a couple of Arctic winters, there are still the novices, and they supply what scant entertainment the muskegs offer. One crew's Indian guide can't stop puzzling about the time he came across the driver of a Sun Oil truck whose rig had stalled early one morning when the thermometer stood at 40 below.

There the trucker was, alone in the sub-zeroness of the muskeg pre-dawn, miles from the MacKenzie highway. Panic-stricken as the once-warm cab grew deathly cold, the driver dragged the seat cushion into the middle of the road, arranged flare pots around his cold perch and huddled in his parka. The Indian who found him shook his head over the encounter. "He no even build a big fire. Plenty wood round him." The driver had crouched over the flare pots' scant warmth when only 20 feet away was a huge pile of brush and logs. He could have tossed in a match and had a raging bonfire within three minutes.

The muskeg Indians will profit even if oil is never found in the bush. "Easy to trap now," a native Slavey told me. "Use horses instead of dog teams." He was referring, of course, to the thousands of miles of roads which have opened the country. From the air, these seismographic trails checkerboard the bush country to the borizons. They've turned the once trackless bush into a kind of giant playing field. Crewmen chide one another, "We're competing in a roadmaking marathon—a kind of northern Alberta Winter Olympics."

One party chief suggested recently that oil companies working the area should stake out tbis sign, "When they came there was only wilderness; when they leave it will still be wilderness, but there'll be roads—at least for awhile." In time, of course, the bush will swallow up the dozer trails, but the Indians say that won't happen for at least 10 years.

The Indians, incidentally, are Canada's luckiest citizens. For while most of Alberta's underlying minerals are owned by the Provincial government, whatever mineral wealth lies beneath reservation land belongs to the Indians—to the Crees, the Beavers and the Slaveys.

While the monosyllabic word "oil" has warmed the blood and transfused wealth and speculation into Alberta's citizenry, it has had a numbing effect on muskeg parties who consider the thermometer's rise to anything above 30 below as heralding a "balmy day." On rare winter days when the mercury edges up toward "0," young seismologists work in their woolly underwear and quip appreciatively as they pass one another, "Real banana belt weather we're having."

Should anyone doubt the significance of the Canadian muskeg operation—probably the world's most lavish oil quest based solely on speculation—let him look at the record. As of February, 1952, there were some 192 seismographic parties prospecting in Texas, still the biggest oil bonanza in world petroleum. [*Continued on page* 47]

Finding water is a problem because nearly everything freezes solid. Baths are confined to just once weekly.

Here, two oil drillers build a fire not only to warm themselves, but to heat their tools before using them.

Caches of fuel oil and gasoline dot the muskeg. Some is flown in, the rest driven over MacKenzie highway.

"Step Up, Friend!"

The bar sign is still around to entice, advise and amuse

The next time you hear someone say, "Remember the old fashioned bar signs? You just don't see them around any more," you can tell him he doesn't patronize the right places.

Bernard Rosenberg has completed a study on bar signs for Yale University's *Journal of Studies on Alcohol.* After visiting 1,030 bars, this is what he concludes:

Most of the signs are found in neighborhood taverns and bear house courtesy rules, credit policy and philosophical tidbits.

Tactful tavern owners still think that their customers feel better about the lack of credit if they display some such sign as "My liquor's good, my measure just; But, honest, sirs, I will not trust," rather than simply chalking the mirror with "Sorry, no credit."

Some bar signs like "Danger! Women Drinking!" remind a man of a time when a woman in a bar was a novelty. Others, humorously philosophize: "When an idea gets into an empty head, it has the time of its life," and ". . . All animals are strictly dry; They sinless live, and quickly die. But sinful, gin-full, rum-soaked men, Survive for three score years and ten!"

Still others offer friendly advice: "Keep your temper. No one wants it," or "If you want to come behind the bar, why in hell don't you buy the place?"

Some argue that the bar signs' function is limited to breeding good fellowship while others maintain that they're simply a come-on—"Drinking water keeps you from getting stiff in the joints—if the joints will serve water."

Whatever the reason for the bar signs, they'll probably be around as long as the friendly tavern is—and to date, there's no indication that either is going out of business.

If you want to get along with people in here,
Always tell a man what to drink,
How much to drink,
And don't forget to correct his speech.
Talk about yourself and never apologize.
Always elbow your way to the bar
When it is crowded.
You need your money and I need mine.
If we both get ours, that will be fine,
But if you get yours and keep mine, too,
What the hell am I going to do?
KWITCHERBELLYAIKIN

In God we trust
Everybody else pays

2 PINTS	= 1 QUART
1 QUART	= 1 ARGUMENT
1 ARGUMENT	= 1 FIGHT
1 FIGHT	= 1 COP
1 COP	= 1 ARREST
1 ARREST	= 1 JUDGE
1 JUDGE	= 30 DAYS

No intoxicating drinks sold to intoxicated people

Don't criticize your
wife's judgment
Look whom
she married!

When St. Peter sees him coming
He will leave the gates ajar,
For he knows he's had his hell on earth,
Has the man behind the bar

Remember . .

There are many good reasons for drinking–
One has just entered my head:
If a man doesn't drink while he's living,
How the hell can he drink when he's dead!

Our Cow
Just died!
We don't need
your Bull!

YOUR FACE
LOOKS GOOD
BUT WE CAN'T
PUT IT IN THE
REGISTER

It's OK to drink like a *Fish*

Provided you drink
what the Fish drinks

Why be disagreeable
When with a little effort
You can be a real
STINKER!

SECRET WEAPON

The intruder had the diamonds, the gun and the boat—but the old prospector still had a deadly trick up his sleeve

by Capt. James R. Johnson, USMC

Illustrated by John Floherty, Jr.

The ragged man first heard the noise about the middle of the morning. It drifted from miles down the Amazon, distorted by the heat waves steaming from the jungle.

Then the noise disappeared. The ragged man continued with his putterings in the river bank clearing, screening sand, and picking in the countless yellow mounds, always looking for that diamond he might have missed.

The gamecock, his sole companion for the past half year, walked over and scratched haughtily at the new sand brought up from the river bottom during the early morning.

"Scat, you dog," the man snapped and tossed a handful of sand back at the rooster.

It was midafternoon when the boat got close. The prospector stood up and dropped his bowl-like screen. The boat was only 10 yards away, its occupant standing in the open cockpit. The man had a poker face. "You Martin Stubbs?" he asked.

"Hey," the prospector called. "Come in. Come in."

The man in the boat grinned. His teeth

The piranha schools came quickly and tore viciously at the flesh of the human who tried to struggle away

showed yellow in contrast to the black stubble on his face.

"Welcome, friend, welcome. Martin Stubbs," his eyes crinkled as he repeated his name aloud. "Yes, sir, I'm Martin Stubbs."

"My name's Leonard. Rip, my friends call me. Folks downriver told me I could pick up some pointers from you on getting diamonds off the bottom."

Martin Stubbs nodded and chuckled. He trotted ahead to the mouldy tent by the banana grove which bordered the clearing and pointed to his hammock under the tent fly. "Have a seat, my friend." He squatted by a mud oven. "I'll get us some food cooking."

After a moment of silence the prospector asked, "So you're hunting diamonds too?"

"Yep. Done a little down this side of Santarem. I figured I'd try my luck up this way awhile."

"Good," Martin Stubbs said. "You stay right here with me for a spell. I'll be about through here anyway by the time the next downriver boat comes by."

"Through?"

"I'm going back to the States. Me and old Red here." He pointed to the cock at his knee waiting impatiently for a handout.

"Oh," Leonard said softly. "Luck run out?"

"Oh, no," the prospector cackled. "Red and me picked up enough to last us for awhile."

"Well look, friend," Leonard said after a moment. "Don't let me hold you up if you got some more work to do before dark. I'll watch your cooking here."

Martin Stubbs jumped up. "Well that's fine. I can take another trip to the bottom before dark. Always time for one more basket of sand." He chuckled, "That last one might be the one with the big diamond."

He bent to take a handful of green leaves from some limbs. After shredding the leaves between his hands, he smeared their drab juices over his arms and legs.

"Derris," he explained. "Chases off the piranhas—them little devil fish that can take a fellow to pieces in time it takes to spit."

The prospector picked up a heavy stone and waded into the water, a wicker basket tucked under his elbow. "Saw a man drownriver dive for sand too soon after he shaved. Had a nick on his cheek. It brought on the little devils."

He spat on a water spider. "Helped pull him out a few minutes later. Whole belly gone. A dozen of the little hellions was still hanging on like bulldogs."

Leonard was bending over the cooking pot when Martin Stubbs blew to the surface like a sputtering seal over a minute later. The prospector swam with one skinny flailing arm while he held the sand basket against his hip with the other.

He climbed past the motorboat, set the heavy basket down and squatted gasping beside it to start his screening. "See you got some fancy diving gear in your boat."

The visitor eyed him for a moment before speaking. "Yeah. Figured I'd cut my time up here. Make it short and quick." Martin Stubbs decided there might have been the trace of a smile on the man's face as he said that.

When the prospector had finished screening, he held up two iridescent blue pebbles. "Good trip that time," he chuckled as he slipped into his clothes.

Leonard strung his hammock on the other side of the clearing while the prospector finished preparing the meal. A short while later the prospector shoved one of his greasy pans into the visitor's lap and poured it full of creamed carne secca, the dried beef of the Amazon basin. Farinha cakes, made from grated mandioca roots, served as bread. Leonard gulped his portion.

After they finished, the prospector threw some tree roots onto the fire. "Ceiba," he said. Then mango leaves. "Smell that, friend. Me and Red's gonna' miss this up home in Colorado. Right fine smell. Smoke'll keep off the bugs."

The prospector was still talking when Leonard rolled yawning into his hammock. He was asleep by the time the prospector got into his.

Martin Stubbs awakened one second before the visitor's heavy shoe caught him in the small of his back and knocked him to the ground where he came alive, a squirming, wretched old man.

"Fool!" Leonard yelled in his face, "I've found your diamonds!"

An incredulous look swept the pain from the prospector's contorted face and he twisted about quickly and stared into the green-heart foliage above the hammock. Too late, the trick dawned on him and he looked down quickly.

"You are a fool," the visitor said contemptuously. He swung the pistol muzzle viciously against the prospector's temple.

Martin Stubbs regained consciousness minutes later. The visitor was climbing down from the tree, the leather pouch of diamonds in his hand. The prospector began to inch painfully along toward the protecting bananas. A bullet splattered the black dirt an inch from the prospector's bloody whiskers and he tottered upright and plunged into the thick leaves. The man in the tree spaced four more shots after him.

After a moment the prospector heard Leonard searching the bushes for him. He hid. He watched from under a log at the edge of the clearing when Leonard sat down on a tree root and fingered the rough diamonds, yellow, black, rose, blue, and a few colorless gems. The visitor poured the diamonds from palm to palm and made them rattle like coins.

The gamecock jumped to a stump in the clearing to squat and crow lustily. Leonard lifted his pistol and shot, then got up and walked over to the flapping bird. "Good shot," the prospector heard him say.

He poked the chicken with his forefinger, and started to pull the feathers out. After a few minutes of futile picking the man gave up in disgust and gutted the fowl with the prospector's sheath knife. He worked a pointed stick through the cock's back and leaned the improvised spit against the oven.

As he built a fire under the chicken, he saw the prospector's rusty carbine hanging under the tent fly. He got it and stepped to the bank to hurl it far out into the water. He bent, washed the sticky chicken blood off his hands, and watched spade-like fish dart about the bloody water.

Back by the fire he spread the diamonds on a rock. He fondled them, counted and recounted, while the chicken cooked. Finally he pulled off a scorched drumstick and began to eat.

Martin Stubbs crawled from under the log. He circled to the boat and shoved it out into the river. He yelled and ran back into the brush.

The visitor leaped to his feet, bringing the pistol up for a quick shot. The bullet only whipped through the leaves.

The craft was bobbing 20 yards out when Leonard hit the water. His feet sucked into the mud and he sprawled flat, then splashed upright and began swimming. He caught the boat after a short chase and held onto the rudder with one hand to catch his breath.

Martin Stubbs stumbled back into the clearing. He bent by the pile of red feathers on the ground and pushed his fingers through them, raking a handful of bloody entrails.

He straightened with difficulty, and loped awkwardly to the bank. There he drew back his hand and flung the entrails out like whirling rope pieces, where they whitened the surface around the resting Leonard.

The piranha schools came quickly. They tore viciously into the human who tried to struggle away from the chicken pieces.

The fish were as efficient as they always were. The water was no longer red when they finished. •

Hugh Roy Cullen, the money man behind the fabulous rise of the University of Houston whoops it up as the Cougars score an upset win.

The Man Who Bought A College Football Team

When millionaire Hugh Roy Cullen said, "I don't like to root for a loser," Houston rounded up the best football team money could buy

By Zarko Franks

Five years ago Houston's football team didn't have one major team on its schedule.

Last year Houston was ranked number 19 in the country and their victims included such big name outfits as Arkansas, Baylor, Tulsa, Oklahoma A & M and Detroit.

This year the Cougars have added Texas and Tennessee, two of the toughest teams in the country, to their already murderous schedule. And they're not playing them just for the exercise—they are confident they'll beat the big boys.

What happened to Houston? Hugh Roy Cullen, one of the top 10 multi-millionaires in Texas, happened to them. To refresh your memory, Hugh Roy Cullen is the man who once gave $160,000,000—that's right, one hundred and sixty million dollars—in one lump sum to charity. Rest assured that didn't break him.

Recently a magazine reported that Cullen had donated between $125,000,000 and $210,000,000 to the University of Houston. This irked him quite a bit. "The people of Houston should know the truth," he said in a statement to the local press. "My gifts amounted to about twenty-five million."

Although Houston's development into a football power really didn't attract national attention until last fall, the story of the Cougars' rise really began some 17 years ago—when Hugh Roy Cullen first became connected with the school. As he explains it, "An old banker friend of mine came to me one day in 1936. He asked me to help in a fund drive for the university. I got interested because I figured Houston needed another great college and I've stayed interested."

And that was the start of it all. The skeptics who thought that even Cullen couldn't help the struggling school were told a story that illustrated the oilman's determination. It happened when he was young, struggling and broke. He was talking to a promoter about backing and he was getting nowhere. The promoter gazed out of the window, paying little attention as Cullen outlined the oil possibilities of an unexplored tract in South Texas.

Suddenly Cullen sprang forward and smashed his fist down on the other's desk. "I came here to talk to you," he roared, "and you'll listen even if I have to grab you by the throat to make you do it."

Paul Carr, Houston's leading candidate for national honors, was playing service ball when gimlet-eyed scouts saw him.

A prize catch was J. D. Kimmel, one of the West Point "sinners." He became the school's first All-American.

The promoter decided to listen.

The evidence of Cullen's interest started to show itself right away as buildings bearing the Cullen name sprung up on the campus, but more than 10 years passed before the athletic department began to benefit by the millionaire's presence. One day, the university's president, W. W. Kemmerer, Athletic Director Harry Fouke and other school officials decided that the school's athletic program should rank with the best in the nation—or be abandoned. It's easy to understand why they wanted a good athletic program—there's no better way for a school to get national attention than through winning athletic teams.

Shortly afterwards the officials huddled with Corbin Robertson, Cullen's son-in-law. Robertson, a dynamic young executive in Cullen's Quintana Petroleum Corporation, is a former Northwestern end. The results of that meeting were good. Men close to the athletic scene at Houston say, "When we made up our minds to shoot for the sky, Mr. Cullen, as chairman of the board of regents, was all for the idea." The general opinion around Houston is that it was Corbin Robertson who convinced his father-in-law that "backing a big time football team to match the growth of the school" was a good idea. In talking about the ball team and Robertson, Cullen just about confirmed this when he said, "Corbin's a real football fan. He's the one who really worked to get the ball club going. He got me so interested that I don't like to root for a loser."

The next step in the building pattern was the selection of a coach. The athletic board decided to interview Clyde Vernon Lee, at the time line coach at Tulsa University.

Lee, a confirmed realist, looked over the athletic set-up, and he didn't like what he saw. And he remembered what his friends had told him. "Clyde," they had said, "you're stepping into a hornet's nest. The school's young and it's got big ideas, but it wants fast results and there's no material there." But he listened when Athletic Director Fouke and Robertson outlined the school's plans. They told him a new air-conditioned dormitory was in the mill. So was a modern cafeteria, a dressing room for athletes and new nylon uniforms.

"We're going first class," said Robertson. "That means air travel in chartered planes and first-class hotel accommodations."

Now there was the big question to be answered. It was the question all new coaches ask—"How far can we go when we try to get a boy to play for us?"

The answer must have been satisfactory. Lee signed a three-year-contract for a reported $10,000 a season.

Several days later Lee and Fouke called on Robertson at the down-town office of Quintana's empire. Lee spread his cards face up. He asked for a major schedule.

"I realize we don't have the material," he told Robertson, "but we've got to schedule name teams before we can attract top boys. This is putting the cart before the horse, so to speak. But I think we'll be all right."

The 1948 schedule didn't include a single major opponent. There was talk of landing William and Mary in 1950. And there was more talk that Baylor of the Southwest Conference would start a home-and-home series with Houston. It was no secret that Baylor wouldn't be hard to persuade. Cullen had made a substantial grant to the Baylor School of Medicine several years previously.

Any and all doubts about how far Houston was going to get with its plans for a big-time schedule were dispelled when Hugh Roy Cullen got up at a football banquet and said, "Within a few years we'll be playing teams like Michigan State, Notre Dame and Tennessee. We'll not only be playing them—we'll be beating them."

That was big talk, but it wasn't idle talk. The new era at Houston had begun.

Houston finished its first season under Lee with an unimpressive five-won, six-lost record against strictly bush-league opposition.

But the wheels were grinding. Houston was making progress although Lee was finding out how tough things could be in the football market—even with money. And the story was out that Houston did have the money to spend. One rumor had them offering $40,000 to a brillant high school star.

The boy in question didn't go to Houston. "The kid had already made up his mind to go to a Southwest conference school," his coach told a sportswriter later.

So Houston had to fight the traditional appeal of the conference schools as well as the fact that their recruiting opponents weren't fooling either.

An example of how far the recruiters go can be found in the case of Kyle Rote, SMU's All-American back. He quit Vanderbilt to enroll at Southern Methodist—and it's no secret in the southland that his girlfriend was given a free scholarship to SMU.

Every Southwest Conference school wanted a boy named Mac Taylor in the worst possible way. Taylor, a highly-rated Lubbock backfield star, stumbled over competing coaches in his living room. One day a Rice representative called on him.

That fall Mac Taylor enrolled at Rice Institute. The story goes that he wanted to study engineering. Now it might have been a coincidence but shortly after he entered Rice, Mac Taylor was driving a brand-new Lincoln convertible Capri.

The battle for Tom Stolhandske, who made All-American at Texas University last year, further illustrates the fierce bidding. Houston and a horde of other Southwestern schools sought the golden-haired Swede, but Stolhandske entered Texas U. Shortly after that his father, a man of modest means, took a trip to Sweden to visit his homeland.

However, Houston wasn't losing them all. Two years ago, J. D. Kimmel, one of the Army cadets expelled in the sensational West Point cribbing scandal, appeared on the University of Houston campus. Kimmel, first string tackle at Army, could have picked his spot anywhere in the nation. Colorado had wanted him. So had Kansas State which adopted several of the accused sinners. But it was Houston who got the big boy.

About the time Kimmel enrolled at U. of H., his family moved to Houston from their home-town of Texarkana and Kimmel's dad went to work here.

The high-pressure recruiters swarmed all over fullback Tommy Bailes, an All-State boy from Littlefield. They helped with the cooking, did the dish-washing, churned the ice cream mixer at the Bailes home. One day a University of Houston spokesman came with the honeyed word. Young Bailes decided Houston was the spot for his talents.

Again coincidence rears its ugly head, but Bailes was seen driving a new automobile shortly after he enrolled.

Then the Cougars got themselves a real prize plum—Paul Carr, a high-stepping fullback—who is being boomed for All-American honors this fall.

Carr, an Azuza, Calif., product, was sought by many schools, among them University of Southern California and Houston's proud neighbor, Rice. Houston Coach Lee got a good look at Paul when the California boy was playing with Ellington Air Force Base, nearby Houston. So did Joe Davis, the line coach at Rice.

Paul came to University of Houston. He married a beautiful co-ed recently. Today he lives in a nice apartment which is well stocked with shiny, new furniture.

Despite the string of successes, there was still plenty of competition rampant and Houston soon found the more experienced recruiters knew a lot of tricks.

A University of Houston alumnus had reportedly offered highly-sought quarterback Dan Page a life-time job after graduation. Page, heralded as a top passer, told sports writers he planned on enrolling at University of Houston. Several days later a University of Texas alumnus approached him.

Rough, tough Buddy Gillioz is a good bet to take over for the departed Kimmel. Lee found him in the hinterlands.

Clyde Lee devotes long hours to briefing quarterback Bobby Clatterbuck, who runs the team on the field.

Houston's modern stadium cost $2,500,000, seats 70,000. The Cougars are confident that their colorful team and big-time schedule will keep it filled this season.

The story goes that the Longhorn backer asked, "Son, what they offer you?"

Page told him about the life-time job deal.

"If they made you that kind of proposition, you snap it up. But do me one favor, will you? Take a lawyer with you and tell them to put it in writing."

Apparently no contract was ever signed because Page enrolled at Texas.

While most schools try to keep a clean house, every coach in the big time and even some in the small time knows there come moments when he must deal under the table, through wealthy alumni and team backers. An Eastern writer and a Texas sports writer were talking about it one day. "What system do they use down here to pay off the athletes?" the Easterner asked.

The explanation was that varsity players in the Southwest Conference were given from four to six tickets for every football game. It was the obligation of alumni, called sponsors, to call on their respective boy and pay him a certain amount for the ducats.

Of course, this is just a part of the overall financial enticement. Different schools use different ways to further help their athletes. The stories say that Houston athletes can earn from $50 to $125 a month (depending on ability) for campus jobs like rolling tennis courts, sweeping out elevators or delivering packages for a couple of hours a day.

Then there is the important matter of summer jobs and Houston is said to do all right by the boys in this department. One season found 60 Houston boys working at a Cullen oil field at a reported $600 a month. Veteran recruiters say that this is about $100 a month more than Rice and Texas athletes were paid for working in the oil fields.

When it comes to recruiting talent, money is not always the deciding factor. The modern athlete wants an abundance of comfort and good food to compensate for the purple bruises picked up on Saturdays.

Houston's athletic family knew this and has done wonders in the way of making conditions right for its athletes.

The dormitories are completely air-conditioned. This is a terrific selling point in miserably-humid Houston. And the air-conditioning isn't the only modern feature around the dorms. The spacious suites contain all-tile bathrooms and modern new furniture with goose-necked, scientific lighting lamps over the desks.

An athlete who scrimmages at least four times a week —and Clyde Lee believes in contact workouts perhaps more than any other coach in the South—uses up a terrific amount of calories. Houston's athletes get those calories back in jig-time—at a well-loaded table. An average breakfast consists of pitchers of milk, orange juice, eggs with ham or bacon or small steaks and a dry cereal. Steaks are the rule not the exception for Houston's warriors. A dietician supervises the menu and most meals include meat, two well cooked vegetables plus a tasty dessert.

The upkeep of a Houston athlete now involves big money. Business Manager Ned Thompson estimates the cost for each athlete per year is about $1200. That includes his scholarship, books, tuition, room and board. If you figure that Houston has about 100 athletes on football scholarships alone, that means roughly $120,000 a year. Throw in another 50 athletes who get the same free ride. Tennis, baseball, track and golf boys like to eat, too.

After coaches' salaries, athletic publicity, travelling expenses, fancy uniforms, you can see that a figure of $500,000 is about right.

To find out just how much Houston has accomplished

on this budget and how far the Cougars have progressed on the big time trail, all you have to do is look at this year's schedule. Houston is slated to face Baylor, Texas, and Texas A. & M. of the Southwest Conference; Detroit, Oklahoma A. & M. and Tulsa of their own Missouri Valley league; Arizona State and Texas Tech of the Border league; and Tennessee, a perennial national power, in the December 5th closing game in Houston.

The team's most faithful fans sometimes get worrying about that back breaking lineup—until they recall last season when the Cougars faced nine major opponents.

What happened is glorious history. After losing the opening game to Texas A. & M. to no one's surprise, the Cougars swept through Arkansas, Oklahoma A. & M., Tulsa, Arizona and Texas Tech. Tulsa, the nation's offensive leader, took a 33 to 7 pasting.

When undefeated, mighty Mississippi came to Houston to do battle, fans figured Houston was due for a rude awakening. Many expected a Mississippi runaway. It was anything but that. The Rebels, the very button on fortune's cap that cloudless, sunny day in Houston, squeezed out a shaky 6-0 victory.

It was then that Houston fans realized that their team was a match for any in the nation. That feeling was solidified the following week-end.

Frank Leahy, Notre Dame's brilliant coach, and other experts called the shot for Baylor to roll over Houston. Clyde Lee's merchants of menace smashed Baylor 28-6 in a stunning reversal. On that same day, Mississippi, squeaky winner over Houston the previous week, broke Maryland's 21 game winning streak with a 21-14 beating.

Riding high now, Houston dusted off Detroit and Wyoming to cinch the Missouri Valley title and finish with an impressive record of eight wins against two losses.

In the final Associated Press football poll, Houston was ranked No. 19 nationally. And J. D. Kimmel was picked on the A. P.'s All-American team.

But that No. 19 rating, which would have been cause for burning down the buildings a few years back, got a cold greeting from the Houston fans. The rating was ridiculous, they screamed. Hadn't Houston riddled Tulsa (ranked No. 11) by a 33-7 score?

Today, U. of H. threatens Rice Institute's supremacy on the Gulf Coast. With its limited enrollment of 1,200 students (there's no tuition fee at Rice; students are selected on scholastic ability) the Owls can't be blamed for looking over their shoulders at the growing giant cross town.

Hugh Roy Cullens' overall effect on the school can be seen by looking at Houston's enrollment. With 14,000 students it is now the second biggest in the state (Texas U. is first). In 1946, there were only 3,000 students in the school.

Looking back at his decision of five years ago, Clyde Lee has no regrets. His three-year contract was fattened and renewed a year ago. He made an unusual move when he first came to Houston. Unlike most new coaches who rent a home when they take a new job, he bought his residence.

"I figured," he smiles, "that I'd be around for a while."

Meanwhile Houstonians, in typical Texas fashion, take the new prosperity of their team in easy stride. "You know something," a University of Houston Downtown Quarterback remarked one day, "I can't understand how that Yawkey fellow up in Boston never got himself a real winner. You reckon he just plumb run out of money?" •

Quick-openers featuring hard-running backs like Harlan Baldridge, shown gaining against Texas A & M, are Houston's stock in trade. Big games this year are with Texas and Tennessee.

Desert Dust—the famous wild horse that avoided capture for five years. Finally, Frank Robbins trapped the animal.

I Catch Wild Horses

Nowadays we use new tricks and round them up by plane, but breaking a wild horse is still rough, dangerous business

by Frank Robbins

When I began rounding them up 18 years ago, wild horses in Wyoming's Red desert were as thick as jackrabbits. I could ride up a butte and see hundreds of them in every direction. They'd be running in bands of 10 to 20—a stallion and his harem of mares and a family of colts. Manes and tails flying in the wind, they were a sight to thrill a cowboy's heart. There must have been 20,000, maybe 25,000 head—beautiful animals grazing and roaming the trackless stretches in complete freedom.

Most of the wild horses are gone now. I don't think there are more than two or three thousand left in all Wyoming. One day soon we'll be sitting in the bunkhouses remembering our adventures and talking about the last of the wild horses, just like we used to talk about the buffalo.

I suppose I've been more responsible for their going than any other single man. Just in the last 10 years I've captured and shipped something like 15,000 head. Catching wild horses is my profession—and it's a profession full of adventure.

The wild horse was doomed the year I learned to make a Piper Cub do the work of a dozen super-saddlehorses. The airplane took most of the sweat, dust and aching muscles out of the business. Nowadays a roundup is a two-man affair. The pilot cruises over the desert until he locates a band, then, using the plane like a wing-footed saddlehorse, he herds the band together and drives them into a corral. The second fellow—that's me—simply closes the gate once the animals are in. Usually in three or four hours we have enough wild horses to keep us busy the rest of the day trucking them out to the railroad.

But flying hasn't robbed the game of its danger and excitement. Not long ago I had a pilot who was having trouble driving a band across a frozen creek. He figured they'd move if he gave them a good goosing. He buzzed them, all right. Got down so close he cracked one side of the landing gear on the rump of a mare.

He straightened out, opened the side panel, reached down and salvaged the wheel and tossed it in the back of the cabin. Then he headed back for the landing strip. I saw him circle once. He tossed out the wheel and a can of gasoline and then he climbed into the rear seat so he wouldn't get the engine in his lap if he cracked up.

About that time he discovered he was sitting there without any way to fly the plane. We'd taken out the rear joystick to make room for some stuff we were hauling. So back he went up front. All the while the Cub was wobbling over the landscape. He brought her down, neat and clean, on a strip that wasn't more than a horse trail 'dozed out of the sagebrush. We rigged the wheel back on and next day he was flying again.

Today, the experts use Piper Cubs to round up wild horses. A large camouflaged corral is set up along a horse trail, and an airplane herds the animals in.

The wild horses run from the shadow and noise of the airplane. Cautiously, the pilot chases them along the horse trail toward the corral.

Frank Robbins puts the final touches on the camouflage. He waits until the wild horses are driven inside, then he closes the gates.

After they're corralled, the animals are sorted. Most go to riding stables, rodeos, ranch owners. The 4-Fs are butchered and sold as food.

I first got the idea of using aircraft to round up wild horses back in 1941. Everett Hogan, an oldtime air mail pilot, came up to the desert in a light plane to work with me. Hogan had no trouble gathering 100 or more horses, but he couldn't drive them into the trap. I figured the traps weren't designed right for aerial herding so I began to experiment with them.

Hogan came back late in 1942. He rounded up 33 horses in just two hours of flying. I knew I was on the right track then, but cold weather set in and we had to quit for the year. Meanwhile Hogan went into the service and my next pilot was Howard Shrum.

I reasoned that if one plane worked well, two of them ought to be even better. Shrum and Curly Wetzel tried flying together but we never had much success. The pilots were costing me $10 each an hour and we barely made expenses. Trouble was, we didn't have a system.

Finally it got to the point where I couldn't meet the payroll and I just about decided to forget about airplanes. With the last of my money I paid off everybody but Shrum, a truck driver and an 11-year-old boy. Shrum was working for the Bighorn Airways at the time and his bosses wanted to know how I was going to pay them. I had 40 acres of alfalfa back home in Glenrock so I put that up for security.

I went up in the plane with Shrum and for three days we just practiced herding wild horses. I discovered that the trick was to start the horses in the right direction and then let them think they were getting away. We'd been worrying them too much. Now we kept away from them. They ran twice as fast if we didn't crowd them. Often the sound of the motor was enough to keep them moving.

Before long we were corralling wild horses faster than we could get them to the railroad at Wamsutter. In two or three hours of flying we'd often round up 75 to 100 horses which used to be a pretty good total for six months.

Those old days were the rough ones. I'd been ranching in Nevada and catching wild horses out there. Drought and depression got the ranch and on top of that we ran out of horses. I sold the ranch and left for my native Wyoming.

When I got to the Red desert I could see thousands of horses. They were worth $15 to $20 apiece. I figured it was the place for me.

That was in 1935. I had a Model A Ford and not much else, not even a saddlehorse. I drove into the desert north of Wamsutter and located a waterhole. The desert was like a furnace but sweet, cold artesian water bubbled up out of the ground.

Working alone for six weeks I fenced in forty acres around the water hole. I didn't have enough money to build a strong enclosure. Most of it was just spook fence—tin cans, rags, even old tires hung on wire. Finally I got the fence and a pen finished.

That night I lay down in the sagebrush to wait for the horses to come for water. The ground was baked so dry and hard I could hear hooves pounding miles away. I'd let the horses get through the mouth of the trap and then I'd jump up and chase them into the corral. That first night I caught 128.

For the next few weeks I'd stay up all night to trap horses. During the day I'd repair fence and brand the animals I'd caught. I lived mostly on black coffee during that period. I learned a lot about horses, too. They're wary as deer and a lot smarter. They can see like cats in the dark. Their sense of smell is as keen as that of any wild animal and they can hear the snap of a twig hundreds of feet away. Gradually they quit coming down to the waterhole. That winter I broke a dozen stallions to saddle and used them the next year to chase wild horses into corral-traps.

Each trap is a little bit different from any other, but generally they're made up of a fence that encloses maybe three or four acres. The trap is [*Continued on page 45*]

Man and horse face one another in the corral where for the last time the animal will struggle for its independence.

The select mounts are trucked to a fenced-in range, released, then broken in to fill a high priced order for a rodeo.

General Cohen:

He dreamed of being a cowboy but failed. Instead he amassed two fortunes, saved the life of China's president, shot the ears off a bandit and stopped an insurrection

by Horace Bailey Brown

Illustrated by Dick Loomis

Cohen's gun barked, and the unsuccessful assassin of China's president pitched into the street, dead. The enraged Orientals began shouting and jumped Cohen before he could run.

China's Mystery Man

Morris "Two-Gun" Cohen shifted his bulky 200 pounds impatiently as he waited for the parade to start. It was October 10th, 1921, Canton, China. A jubilant celebration commemorating the tenth anniversary of the birth of the Chinese Republic was in progress. Thousands of patriots and foreigners lined the streets as far as the eye could see. Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder and president of the Republic, was to make one of his rare public appearances.

Following the shrill and clatter of an Oriental military band, the first units of the marchers came into view. Behind a platoon of soldiers were the official cars. In one of them was the great revolutionist himself, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, standing, and waving to the screaming crowd.

Only for an instant did Cohen's eyes linger on the approaching marchers. Nearby he saw a sinister looking Chinese, slowly edging his way toward the curb. One of the fellow's hands was partly hidden in the folds of his jacket. From where he stood, Cohen caught a glimpse of the butt of a revolver.

Cohen looked around. A moment before scores of police had been nearby. Now, like everyone else, they were crowding to the front to get a better view of the chief of state.

Cohen, who was armed, knew that if he drew his gun he would be cut down without mercy. Suddenly the man raised his hand. He held a pistol. Cohen heard him shout something in Chinese.

Then a gun barked. But it wasn't the assassin's. It was Cohen's.

Pandemonium broke loose. Cohen was seized by rough hands even as the unsuccessful murderer pitched to the street dead. The emotional Orientals, thinking the foreigner had attempted to kill their beloved president, were

mauling him unmercifully when a voice, charged with authority, ordered:

"Stand back! I'll take care of this man."

Dr. Sun, who had witnessed the action, waved the crowd away and grasped the hand of the little gunman who had saved his life.

"You will ride with me the rest of the way and be my guest at the presidential palace tonight," he said, leading Cohen to his car.

From that minute until Dr. Sun's death nearly four years later, on March 12th, 1925, Two-Gun Cohen was the bodyguard of the president of China. They became close personal friends, Two-Gun eventually winning so much of Sun's respect that he was made a general in the Chinese Nationalist Army.

Morris Abraham Cohen is an Englishman by birth, a Canadian by adoption. An audacious, poker-faced man of rotund physique, with a natural flair for the dramatic, his burning ambition when a boy had been to become an American cowboy. Reading the *Police Gazette* when he could find copies in his native London, he dreamed of the adventure and wealth to be found in the fabulous American West. But at an early age a tailor's needle was thrust in his hand. His father, a rabbi, said he must learn a trade. The click of a needle against his thimble was a far cry from the thundering hooves of stampeding cattle. The clang of tram car gongs was a poor imitation of booming six-guns.

Eventually, young Morris became a salesman for a Scottish woolen goods house. He did well and was sent to Canada. This suited him fine. He envisioned the promotion as a means of getting to America and the cattle ranges he dreamed of.

He reached Wyoming in 1912, and made his bid for a job. Being short and heavy, range ponies tired under his 200 pounds, and whenever he attempted to use a rope, he invariably snarled it around the horse's legs with disastrous results. His only recommendations were his enthusiasm and ability to handle revolvers. He could shoot with speed and accuracy few veteran westerners could match.

Dismayed, Cohen left Wyoming and a week later reported to his office in Edmonton, Alberta, where he was supposed to have gone in the first place. He was greeted with the news that he had been fired. Cohen left the office broke in a strange land without friends.

Perhaps his ability with revolvers would get him employment. It was worth a try, so that afternoon he spent his remaining cash for ammunition, walked to the outskirts of the city and practiced shooting.

As Cohen concentrated on banging away at tin cans, tossing them in the air and hitting them two or three times before they fell to the ground, Lu Fang, a restaurant owner in Edmonton's Chinatown, stopped to watch.

"You shoot well," the Oriental remarked.

Cohen beamed. "If you got a couple of silver dollars handy I'll show you some real shootin'."

Lu Fang produced them.

Adjusting his guns so they were loose in the holsters, Cohen placed the coins on the backs of his hands, held them out at arm's length in front of him, then with a swift motion, he pulled his hands from under them, drew his revolvers and fired. Each dollar "clinked" and spun away before it touched the ground.

Lu Fang smiled. "Very good indeed. I can use a man like you in my restaurant, *Two-Gun.*"

That was how Morris Cohen got his first job in Canada and was christened with a name that has stuck through the years. Cohen became bouncer, greeter and entertainer in Lu Fang's chop suey house.

No drunken miner or roistering cowhand intimidated him. The first night he shot the gun out of a troublemaker's hand, and before the evening was over proved his versatility by beating up another with his chubby fists. Soon, Cohen was faced with a fresh dilemma. The rough characters began avoiding Lu Fang's. Fearful he would lose his job, he turned his amazing talents to entertaining the nightly guests. He never lacked an audience to listen to the tall tales of his real and fancied adventures. He became an attraction. Business boomed and Cohen's fortunes mounted.

By the end of two years Cohen knew many of the Chinese in Edmonton. He learned their language and always carried a pocket full of pennies for the children.

One time Cohen heard that a Chinese laborer had been swindled. He had been sold a few acres of worthless bog for $300. Cohen's crafty mind soon hatched a plan to recover the money. Representing himself to the real estate dealer as interested in swamp land where he could raise frogs, their legs being a favorite Chinese delicacy, he said he had learned the man owned a tract just suited to his purpose. He would pay a thousand dollars.

The real estate dealer, realizing he would first have to buy back the property from the Chinese, stalled. He said he thought the deal might be arranged but it would require time.

Cohen pulled out a roll of bills and stripped off a hundred dollars. "Tell you what," he said, "I'll buy a three-day option for a hundred. If you can get the land for me, good. If you can't, return the money."

The deal was made. When Cohen left, the real estate dealer hurried to the coolie's shack and tried to buy back the bog for the three hundred dollars originally paid. The Chinese, already briefed by Cohen, seemed in no hurry to sell. So the swindler increased his offer to $400, finally closing the transaction for $600.

When the three days passed and the holder of the option didn't show up, the swindler went looking for him. Cohen never cracked a smile. "Changed my mind," he said. "Keep the hundred for your trouble."

Infuriated when he realized he had been tricked, the real estate agent threatened Cohen with his life. The little gunman whipped out a revolver and shoved it into the fellow's belly so hard it doubled him up. "Now git!" he boomed.

The man got and that was the end of it. The coolie returned Cohen's hundred dollars and kept $500 for himself.

Cohen's financial genius, which expressed itself in fortunes made and lost later in his life, was not always directed entirely toward helping others. Honest, generous to a fault, he nevertheless insisted on his cut whenever he engineered a deal. He was a big spender, lavish entertainer, rich one day, broke the next.

The entry of Canada into World War I found Cohen enlisting as a sergeant major in the 218th Battalion. For a while he trained troops, then was sent overseas.

Four years in France changed him little except to make him sleeker, tougher and improve his marksmanship. The stories of his bravery and mercy on the battlefield are legendary. He returned home a distinguished warrior. And his reputation as a soldier-of-fortune did not suffer by his own telling when he returned to Lu Fang's.

With all his versatility as a story teller, he never has been known to put himself in a hero's role. Like Kilroy, he was only there. It was always someone else who performed the Herculean feats.

By the summer of 1921, Cohen had accumulated a second fortune, this time in lumber. He had spent most of his previously acquired wealth abroad. In one spontaneous outburst of generosity he gave 10,000 pounds Sterling to build a playground in the Whitechapel slum area of London where he had grown up as a boy. To the living members of his family he gave generously. Money to Morris Cohen was merely something to spend. He always was happiest when he was doing something for other people.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who lived in Denver, Colorado, while the Chinese revolution was boiling, returned to Canton in

1911 to become the republic's first president. The country seethed with unrest. Fabulously rich war lords were selling the services of their mercenary armies to the highest bidders. The *hung-hutzes,* bandits, were kidnapping foreigners, looting and murdering.

In Canada, as elsewhere throughout the world, there were groups of Chinese opposed to Dr. Sun's government. So violent was the rivalry, these forces plotted constantly for his assassination.

One of Sun's arch enemies was Kang Wu-wei. At the time Cohen was at the peak of his popularity among the Canadian Chinese, Kang was in Vancouver, B. C. when he heard of the exploits of the little gunman. He tried to hire Cohen to go to China and assassinate the president.

Up to this time Cohen had remained neutral in the Chinese political debate. When Kang approached him with his murderous proposal, he listened quietly and told him he'd think it over.

He went straight to Lu Fang and told the story.

Lu's eyes narrowed to mere slits. "So," he said, when Cohen finished, "they want you to kill him. I have a better idea. You will be the means of *saving* the doctor's life."

After Sun Yat-sen's death, Cohen joined forces with Chiang Kai-shek and often dined with him. An aggressive man, Cohen loved uniforms and pomp.

Cohen had wanted to go to China for years. Now, as Lu Fang's plan was unfolded, the opportunity arrived. They enlisted the aid of a wealthy Edmonton merchant who was about to make a business trip to the Orient. Like Lu Fang, he was a close friend and supporter of Dr. Sun. He readily agreed to take Cohen to Canton. There, he was to be introduced to associates of the president and be appointed to the staff of Sun's bodyguard.

It was Cohen's first day in Canton, when he was waiting to present his credentials to Dr. Sun's aides, that he decided to take in the great parade. So Lu Fang's prophetic words of saving Sun's life came to pass more speedily than anyone could have suspected.

In the years that followed, Two-Gun, now known as General Cohen, proved himself a master organizer of troops as well as a skillful hand at intrigue and diplomacy. When Dr. Sun died, he joined Chiang Kai-shek and soon became uncompromisingly entangled with the destiny of China. To the Orientals, he became General Ma Kung.

Cohen's ability to deal with the fabulously rich war lords and bandit leaders was uncanny. He lured many of them, together with their troops, to join the Nationalist Army. Because of his success, he was rewarded by being one of the few white men to be admitted to China's revolutionary political party.

Cohen would disappear for weeks at a time to put down an insurrection, or stir up one if it was to the advantage of the Nationalist regime. He dealt in arms with the munitions barons of the world as casually as he once had sold cloth. He demanded his commissions and always received them. His influence grew steadily. No door to the highest official's office was ever closed to him. Neither governors nor ambassadors kept him waiting. He was respected and feared, for Morris Cohen knew the magic words that got him what he wanted in high places.

An aggressive, bombastic man, Cohen loved uniforms and pomp. As his influence mounted in China, he lost no opportunity to let the people know who he was and when he was coming. Whenever a train he was traveling on stopped at a way-station, a brass band would appear to serenade him. No matter how secret his mission or how improbable it would have been for anyone to know of his presence except by official announcement, the bands were always there, and Cohen invariably appeared on the train platform, decked out in gaudy uniform and medals, to take his bow and wave to the admiring coolies.

When the Communists started the war of attrition in the North, claiming that their rebels were not Communists, really, but patriotic agrarians who wanted only land reforms, Morris Cohen was not fooled by their propaganda. He hated the Communists and was among the first to realize that Russian spies and secret agents had infiltrated the Army. Even the general staff of Chiang Kai-shek was not above his suspicion.

It was General Cohen who discovered a plan to assassinate the Generalissimo.

During the years Russia began making peace overtures to the rest of the world, Michael Borodin, one of the shrewdest and most ruthless of the Soviet secret agents was sent to China to assist in the revamping of the Nationalist Army. With him came another spy, a General Galen, who became chief of staff.

Through counter spies Cohen learned of a plot to murder Chiang Kai-shek.

Quietly, Cohen rounded up a group of Nationalist soldiers he knew were loyal. He trained them for specific jobs, then planted them in and around Canton. The Generalissimo was in Nanking and the time set for the coup was on his return to Canton. Cohen was ready.

That night a platoon of soldiers, commanded by a Russian captain, marched toward Chiang's quarters.

Fifty yards from the compound they were challenged, and halted.

Out of the darkness stepped General Cohen. "What cooks?" he roared. Cohen was seldom known to speak softly under any circumstances.

The captain didn't understand the English jargon.

"What's this all about? Why are you here with these troops?" Cohen demanded.

Realizing the plot had been discovered, the Russian raised his weapon, but that's all he did, for there was a loud boom and he pitched to the compound pavement, dead. An instant later the sharp chatter of a machine gun came from the direction of the Generalissimo's house. Another burst followed from behind the platoon. Presently there *was* no platoon. Fifteen Communist traitors were dead and the abortive raid, intended to liquidate Chiang Kai-

shek, had backfired in the face of the Soviet agents.

Of course the Russian controlled troops stationed at headquarters were immediately ordered to attempt to carry through with the plan. General Cohen had prepared for just such an eventuality. Before an hour passed his loyal soldiers were brought up for the bloody battle.

Long before dawn the Communists were routed. For more than two days the public square ran red with the blood of executed traitors. Borodin and Galen fled for their lives.

About this time Chiang was having trouble equipping his army. Appeals to the traditionally-friendly United States government brought little response beyond vague promises mingled with accusations of corruption in high places in the Nationalist government. The war lords and *hung-hutzes* were having a field day dickering for services.

The war lords he handled with a guile superior to their own. He promised arms and money for their support. He didn't know where he was going to obtain either, but he got away with it. With the bandits, who had stepped up their pace of kidnapping foreigners and holding them for ransom, he was ruthless. Whenever he caught up with them, he didn't ask questions. Just shot. Soon the bandits were eating out of his hand. Hundreds joined Chiang's forces.

It was then General Cohen decided to return to the Western world and see what could be done about desperately-needed help. He contacted a munitions salesman connected with a Cincinnati, Ohio, concern and cooked up a deal to have rifles, machine guns and ammunition shipped into China through the British port of Hong Kong. Next, he went to England to make a deal with Vickers and Skoda. Soon, the supplies Chiang needed, began flowing in. Some went to the greedy war lords.

During these negotiations General Cohen lost neither face with the Chinese, prestige with Chiang nor suffered financially as a result of his scheming.

The first thing he always did when he made a new stake after a period of insolvency was to pay his debts. The parties he threw at the Hong Kong Hotel were perfection in cuisine and staggering in cost. It was nothing for him to give a banquet for as many as 500 people. A tremendous eater himself, he would consume so much food that at times he couldn't get up from the table. Yet his only indulgence in alcohol was a little of the choicest wine money could buy. His account at the Hong Kong Hotel sometimes was unpaid for months at a time. Yet he always had unlimited credit.

When Dr. Harvey Howard, a professor at Union Medical College in Peking, was kidnapped and held for $50,000 ransom by Tso Shan and his bandits, General Cohen went to the rescue. While reconnoitering near a settlement, Cohen and a companion were surprised by ruffians led by Pei Tien. They were rivals of Tso and were waiting to steal Dr. Howard and collect the ransom themselves.

Chagrined, Cohen nevertheless was far from beaten. Pei, discovering his prisoners had no money, was infuriated. He ordered his men to seize the white man.

Instantly Cohen whipped out his guns and held the bandits at bay. But Pei, not to be thwarted so easily, drew a cutlass and came on.

Cohen's weapons blazed. The bandit chief dropped his sword, stood for a moment in amazed perplexity, then put both hands to the sides of his head. When he looked at them they were dripping with blood. He then realized that Cohen had nicked both his ears.

The effect of the white man's boldness and marksmanship was sensational. Pei's wrinkled, leathery yellow face suddenly became wreathed in smiles under the streams of blood dripping from his mutilated ears.

"Hi-Yi," he howled gleefully while his bandit crew looked on in confusion. "You good shot. Maybe you killed me. Now we friends."

Realizing his advantage, Cohen proposed that Pei join in the rescue of Dr. Howard. There would be no ransom, he said, but the bandit chief and his men could join the Nationalist Army. All their sins would be forgiven.

After some meditation, Pei agreed.

That night the bandits, led by Pei and General Cohen, attacked the stronghold of Tso Shan. So sudden was the onslaught that Dr. Howard was found safe, his captors having had no time to harm him. Tso Shan, wounded in the fight, was captured and taken back to Canton. When he recovered, Cohen talked him into rounding up his scattered bandits and joining the Nationalist Army.

Soon a new danger confronted China. The Japanese were moving in. Split by conflicting political ideologies, betrayed by traitors and false friends, China lacked the tools of war to wage a successful campaign against the Japanese. Steadily the Nationalists were pushed back.

General Cohen became more important than ever. Wise to the ways of the Orient, his crafty mind devised schemes to outwit the Japanese at every turn. Infuriated by their loss of face, as the result of Cohen's activities, they set a price on his head. Time after time they had him trapped. Yet he always escaped.

Once he was taken prisoner with a group of American missionaries near Kuling. Among the terrified group was a beautiful young English girl.

The Japanese officer in command had eyes only for her. Ordering the soldiers to guard the others he started dragging her toward an abandoned shack.

Cohen had seen enough. Before the officer realized what was happening, there was a sharp command. Turning swiftly, he looked into the muzzles of two revolvers in the hands of the white man. Instantly he recognized Cohen.

"Miserable Jew, General Ma Kung," he hissed in rage, "for this you die."

He never spoke again. Before Cohen's guns began exploding there had been six Japanese soldiers and their officer standing there. A moment later there were seven dead men. Cohen then led the party to Kiukiang where it was placed aboard sampans and ferried to safety.

The march of the Japanese south became irresistible as Chiang's forces retreated. Soon Shanghai fell.

It was Cohen's devotion to the Madame Sun that led to his capture by the Japanese after the fall of Hong Kong. He refused to leave when others abandoned the city.

The Japanese were not easy on him. In Stanley Camp, where Chinese and foreign prisoners were concentrated, he was tortured, beaten and starved in an effort to force from him information concerning Chiang's military plans as the Nationalist forces withdrew to Formosa. For some reason the Japanese didn't kill him, perhaps because he was a Canadian.

When General Cohen sailed from Hong Kong to Goa, from where he was to return to Canada on the second Gripsholm voyage, he had lost 80 pounds, but after a few months of rest in Canada, he completely recovered.

General Cohen did not return to the Orient until after the Japanese surrender. Since then he has gone back every year, for what purpose only he knows.

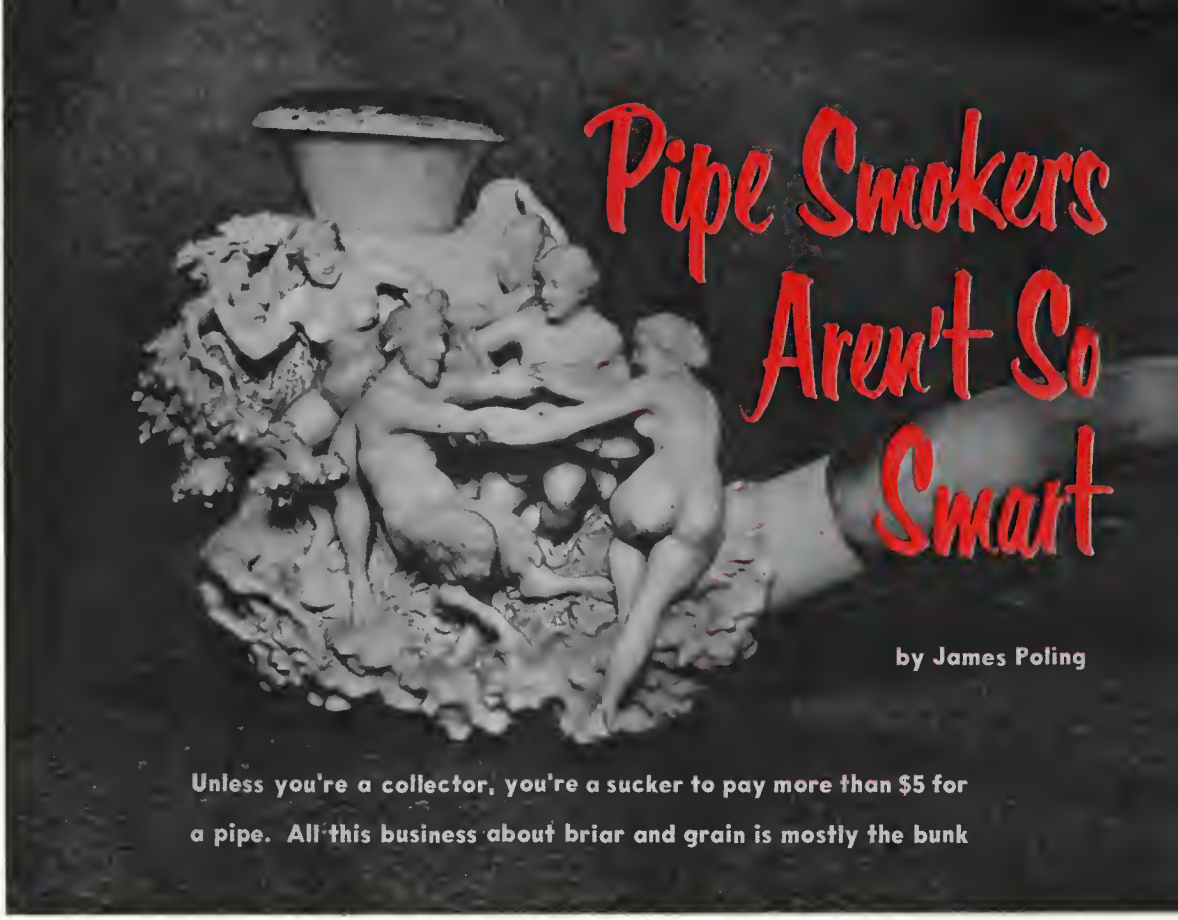
Today, his headquarters is in Taipeh, Formosa, the capital city of Chiang Kai-shek's island stronghold. Whenever the old China hands read of a new revolt against the Communist government, they wink wisely and say: "Two-Gun Cohen must be back."

A year ago General Cohen was the guest of his old friend, Theo Saphire, in New York. One day while they were walking along Broadway, the general said he wanted to take in a movie.

"Sure," said Saphire. "What would you like to see?"

Cohen was silent. Presently he stopped in front of a theater marquee. "Let's go in here," he said.

Saphire looked up. A cowboy picture was showing. •



Pipe Smokers Aren't So Smart

by James Poling

Unless you're a collector, you're a sucker to pay more than $5 for a pipe. All this business about briar and grain is mostly the bunk

Like most collectors' items, this delicately carved meerschaum has no set price. Its value depends on how you feel about it.

Of the 16,000,000 men in this country who puff on briars, the odds are that their knowledge of the pipes they smoke consists largely of half-truths, old wive's tales and data they picked up from a man who knew a man who knew a man.

A pipe smoker is frequently a man possessed. His pipes take on the quality of a fetish and the man who smokes one regards it with that loving reverence with which a Trobriand Islander regards his fertility amulet. And he has about the same degree of exact knowledge of what makes his amulet work. He talks learnedly about Algerian and French briar; about straight grain, bird's-eye and cross grain, about how to break in the bowl and how to clean it, but one will get you five that he actually knows very little about his favorite subject.

Which isn't at all surprising, since manufacturers of briar pipes contradict each other with explosive gusto and then, behind locked doors, confess to a considerable lack of precise or scientific knowledge of their own product.

Briar pipes were first commercially manufactured in France in 1851—and there has been no fundamental change in their construction since that date. The imported briar used in pipe making grows in the Mediterranean basin: in Algiers, Corsica, Italy, Spain, Greece and France. Some manufacturers claim that Algerian briar is the best, others lean toward the French. Some vote for the Greek briar, yet there are those who say they've never even heard of this variety! On a show of hands Algerian briar is the victor.

The briar family, with its more than 1,200 varieties, grows around the world but the White Heath *(Arica arborea)* grows exclusively in the drought-ridden rocky soil of the Mediterranean basin and, having the toughest struggle for existence, produces the hardest root. Other varieties of briar root are softer and burn and crack more readily. The only reason Mediterranean briar is preferred for pipes is because it is more fire resistant than other woods and less likely to crack under heat. Also, this briar is somewhat porous and readily takes a deposit of carbon, which has the advantage of making tobacco smoke sweeter. Briar roots grow very slowly and develop a close-

Pipes that sell for $25 smoke little better than those selling for five.

Pipes from this wood pile may be presented on a velvet tray by a gloved hand, but they'll be little better than a $2.50 job.

knit, fine-grained burl which contains less gum and resin than is found in softer woods. The older the briar, obviously, the better for pipe purposes.

Not all pipes are made from briar grown on the shores of the Mediterranean. Webster once lazily defined briar as "any of the various woods used in the manufacture of pipes." Thereafter a manufacturer was, by an inverted technicality, protected if he stamped briar on a pipe made from any wood. Phrases like "aged briar," "best briar" and "choice briar" need not necessarily mean any more than that the pipe so designated is made from wood.

Pipes have been made from the roots of the Rhododendron, Manzanita, English Yew, Mountain Laurel, Sorrel, Mesquite and Chaparrel, to name a few. After they have been made up, polished and stained it would take an expert to distinguish between them and briar. A pipe purchaser won't harm his cause if he selects a pipe stamped "Imported Briar."

Mediterranean briar should not be harvested before the roots are at least 50 years old and over 10 inches in diameter. The nature of the root is such that only about 30 per cent is suitable for pipe manufacture. This segment is cut into blocks which roughly correspond to traditional pipe shapes and sizes. The blocks after seasoning and drying are sorted and packed into bags which hold from 40 to 100 dozen.

When the manufacturer receives the bag all he knows is that he is the possessor of so many dozen rough blocks. Until he cuts into them he has no sure way of telling what grade of pipes they will produce. Ten per cent to as high as 40 per cent of the blocks may be so flawed that they will have to be thrown away—or sold to a factory specializing in cheap pipes. One or two of the blocks may produce fine-grained bowls for which the manufacturer feels he can charge $25. Rarely a block will cut into a perfectly grained, flawless, $100 bowl. The greater majority of the usable blocks produce pipe bowls which fall into the $1 to $5 range. Ninety per cent of the pipes on the market contain flaws.

Precision machines whittle a pipe and its bit into shape in short order. A good-sized factory can turn out 12,000 pipes a day. The so-called "hand carved" pipes, in the true sense of the phrase, do not exist among commercial pipes; they are all machine-tooled products.

Not that truly hand carved pipes aren't available. Perhaps it would be more precise to call them sculptured pipes. For $5,000 you can buy from a craftsman named Hartsock, in Indianapolis, five pipes carved to represent Old King Cole, Bacchus, The Forty-Niner, The Huntsman, and The Fox and the Pheasant. And a man named Robert L. Marxman, a sculptor turned pipe manufacturer, will sell you a single pipe for $5,000 (for cash you can probably get a discount). This little item is the work of the celebrated artist Jo Davidson and was presumably executed with loving care since it is a sculptured portrait of Jo Davidson. Hand carved pipes are definitely collectors' items.

This doesn't alter the fact that considerable commercial promotion is given to what are quaintly called "hand carved" pipes. This label is achieved by virtue of the fact that a workman holds the bowl in his hands while pressing it against a couple of mechanically rotated blades. The blades carve away blemishes and flaws and permit a manufacturer to put into circulation briar he otherwise might discard.

After a smooth-finish pipe has been whittled and buffed into shape it is passed on to an artisan who plugs up the worm holes and imperfections. Pipe putty, which is mixed with shellac, French varnish, whiting and analine dye, cannot be detected by the untrained eye after the pipe has been stained.

Before staining, all briar looks the same. The pipe that greatly intrigues you has been prettied up for the same reason that a chorus girl behind the footlights has been made-up—to cover imperfections and to catch your eye. Every manufacturer zealously guards the formula of his dye, stain or lacquer. It is one of his few trade secrets. Some stains can even produce grain where grain didn't exist before.

On the whole, the natural finish pipe, usually treated

Most collectors care little about the smoking quality of their "items," and what they pay depends on why they collect them.

with an oil or a wax, gives the inexperienced buyer a better chance to see the piece of wood he is purchasing.

Not that its all-important to *see* the grain of a piece of briar in detail. It's important to know there aren't *too many* flaws and that the briar does have grain—at least if you don't want your pipe to smoulder through. Whether or not it is a straight grain, bird's-eye or cross grain makes little difference. If it's a seasoned, grained piece of briar with few flaws it should make a good smoke.

Tobacco normally burns in the pipe bowl at approximately 1500 F., and if a smoker huffs and puffs until the tobacco temperature reaches the ignition point of the wood he has only himself to blame. A bowl cracks, usually, because the smoker doesn't realize that he should keep the caking of his pipe scraped down to a thickness of about $\frac{1}{16}$th of an inch. Excessive caking frequently causes a pipe to crack since carbon has a greater rate of expansion than briar.

As a matter of unpublicized fact, pipe smokers talk a lot of tosh about the grain and briar of their pipes. *Once the pipe is caked the briar ceases to exist so far as smoking is concerned.* From $3 to $5 you can buy pipes that will give you just as good a smoke as a $25 or a $100 pipe. Anything, roughly, over $5 spent on a pipe is spent exclusively for its appearance, not its smoking quality.

If you are a pipe collector and spend $25, $100 or $200 for a pipe that's something else again. Your purchase is understandable; but there are too many throwing away hundreds of dollars, thinking that price has bearing on quality.

When a manufacturer comes up with a really excellent piece of briar he has no factual way of evaluating its worth, no standard scale exists. So—what price pipe? Obviously, whatever he thinks he can get.

The auction sale of the pipe collection of the late George Ellis Garey illustrates how difficult it is to evaluate the worth of any exceptional pipes. Garey is supposed to have spent over a half a million dollars on his collection. The auctioneer appraised it at $13,000. The two-day sale realized $5,000.

In buying a pipe the average man is really in a pretty helpless position and a good majority of sales people are just as unknowing as the purchaser. Modern manufacturing techniques are so good at covering up blemishes that only a trained eye can detect them. However, there are certain things a buyer can look for.

You will be on safer ground if you (1) specify imported briar, (2) select a natural finish pipe, and (3) ask for a reputable brand.

Check the outside of the bowl for obvious imperfections and bald spots. The higher the price the better and more uniform the grain *should* be. Look inside the bowl; if it is so heavily stained you can't see the grain, don't buy it. The hole at the bottom of the bowl should be centered and flush with the bottom so the pipe will draw evenly.

Formulas for breaking in a new pipe are as varied as bathtub gin formulas during the prohibition era. Many experienced pipe smokers advise filling the bottom third of the bowl in the beginning and smoking it slowly to avoid cracking the bowl. Repeat this procedure until the bottom of the bowl begins to build up a carbon deposit. After the base is satisfactorily broken in fill the bowl two-thirds full and smoke it until the next section of the pipe is broken in. Then begin smoking a full pipe. Always let your pipe cool between smokes. If the smoke is bitter the pipe is hot or dirty.

The man who smokes a pipe is supposed to be quite a guy. Women love him and he is known to be a person of irreproachable character. Eight hundred women editors who were recently polled came up with a majority vote to the effect that just as nylons enhance a woman's sex appeal so does a pipe increase a man's sexual allure!

This aphrodisiacal magic doesn't necessarily work in reverse. Witness the well known humorous artist who, as a member of the reserve, was called to immediate duty after Pearl Harbor. His wife was away at the time so he left a note for his brother which, in part, read, ". . . and so I'm afraid I must leave my wife, my house and my pipes in your hands for the present. Please, take good care of the pipes. . . ." •

YOUR SEX LIFE: Too Much or Too Little?

by Eric Northrup

EVERY MAN HAS HIS OWN INDIVIDUAL SEX QUOTA. HERE'S HOW TO FIND YOURS

With sex to the right of him and sex to the left of him, and with hundreds of "experts" turning out thousands of books and articles on successful sex practice, the average American male is still saddled with the big $64 question: "How much sex is good for *me*?"

A well-known physician, Dr. Fred Brown, who recently lectured on sex problems to GI's stationed in Germany, reports that the most common questions asked concerned the effects of abstinence on male health. Nine out of 10 men who asked these questions got their basic knowledge at a time when doctors and so-called authorities on sex had no real facts to answer with. Most of the time they talked off the top of their heads—some with good sound common sense—but the majority with fuzzy unscientific notions dragged along from primitive superstitions and religious prejudices.

Now, for the first time, medical science has learned the real facts about one of the fundamental processes in your life. Any one reading these facts intelligently can gauge his own sexual capacities and master the most pleasurable instinct known to man.

FACT 1: Overwhelming evidence shows that so-called "normal" frequency of sexual intercourse varies widely from man to man and sometimes even within the same individual. There is no single yardstick for all.

FACT 2: Low frequency of intercourse does not injure health, except where the male deliberately suppresses his sex drive.

FACT 3: Sex activity is not weakening. There is absolutely no evidence to prove that loss of semen (ejaculatory fluid) saps your energies. High sex activity, when carried on in good health and with adequate rest, diet, etc., can be maintained without injurious effect.

FACT 4: Too much sex now does not lead to impotence or sterility in later life. Early satisfactory sexual outlet, in fact, helps to prolong virility into old age, and to prevent impotence. Conversely, men who remain virgins until their late 20's or after, often experience so many adjustment problems that they fail to develop a healthy sex life.

The above statements may seem like pat answers to a set of thorny questions, but they make sense when one looks closer at the total picture behind them.

One part of that picture takes us to the New York Lying-In Hospital, where Dr. John McCleod has spent 14 years examining human semen under the microscope. In all this time, Dr. McCleod has studied thousands of specimens of ejaculatory fluid from men who had abstained from sexual intercourse for prolonged periods of time. In no single case, says Dr. McCleod, has he found that such continence adversely affects the quality or quantity of semen, nor has he seen any injurious effects upon the health.

Another part of the picture takes us to the quiet academic chambers of a university professor at Bloomington, Indiana. Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, hailed as the world's number one authority on the sexual behavior of the human male, has been piling up tens of thousands of detailed case histories on the private sex lives of men of all ages. Dr. Kinsey's findings prove conclusively that the male of the species can stay healthy with as little as two copulations per year and with as many as four daily.

To round out the image, add the work of scores of doctors and scientists who are busy setting the record straight on the zestful, lifegiving experience we call sex.

How does that record stack up with what we have been taught to think about sex and with our own experience?

An ancient superstition, dating back to primitive man, still plagues a lamentably large part of our population with the notion that the discharge of seminal fluid robs physical vigor and, when done in excess, may even lead to insanity. One extreme expression of this idea is the gobbledygook theory that semen is "white blood," and that every drop of semen you lose is like losing a drop of blood.

Weird as it may sound, this strange notion is not far distant from the terrible warnings against masturbation and "overindulgence" that are hangovers from Victorian morality. There's not a shred of evidence to support them. In fact, most doctors and guidance counselors are throwing out the words "oversexed" and "overindulgence." As Dr. Albert Ellis, noted New York psychologist, puts it, "It is almost impossible to have too much love-life—if you are honestly fulfilling your own sex drive." That "if" may sound like a large one, but medical experience has shown that normal men rarely try to overreach their

GOTHAM GAME WARDEN

Anthony Mazza hunts in the asphalt jungle

Out in the Jackson Hole country of Wyoming a ranch hand who had been bagging antelope and other game illegally and shipping it to an exclusive New York City restaurant got the surprise of his life when a lad from the U. S. Department of Interior dropped in and demanded, "How come?"

The ranch hand had covered his trail shrewdly. He had neatly figured out all of the angles—except one. A game warden named Anthony Mazza in far away Manhattan had found illicit antelope steaks in a restaurant freezer and asked the owner some pointed questions. When they were answered, Uncle Sam was notified and backtracked on the shipment.

Big as it is, New York City is a pretty hot place to try to dispose of illegal game, fish and fur pelts—because of Mazza's vigilance. He's Gotham's only game warden, officially "Game Protector for the New York State Conservation Department" and he's been patrolling Manhattan's steel-and-concrete forests for almost 13 years.

A tall, good-natured chap with a pair of ham-like fists, Mazza wears the same gray uniform, Stetson and revolver which is regulation for other wardens in bush and timber country. The revolver has been window dressing for 13 years—he's drawn it only for cleaning and periodic target practice.

As a game protector Mazza has the world's most complicated beat. He spot-checks pelts in more than 1,800 fur shops, examining trappers' and shippers' tags to make sure that the fur has been legally taken. This means he has to be familiar with the game laws not only of his own state but of all other states as well. "There are some game animals which are protected in New York and not in some of the other states," he explained. "We work on the logical basis that if an animal has been taken legally elsewhere the pelt is okay here. If anything beyond our jurisdiction turns up, we tell the U. S. Department of the Interior and they investigate."

This also applies to game food. Mazza follows a devious trail through the big wholesale markets and butcher plants, restaurants and night clubs, peeping into frozen food lockers at such delicacies as quail, plover, woodcock, ptarmigan, bear, moose, venison and buffalo to see if they're legally tagged.

His beat leads him into the fish markets where he keeps a vigilant eye out for "shorts" in fish and in shellfish such as lobster. He also drops in on feather merchants and millinery manufacturers to find out if any songbirds or other protected birds or fowl are becoming hat decorations. Occasionally he finds something fancy and exotic in forbidden plumage. Sometimes he finds a bird that's downright commonplace, like a robin. That's protected too.

He visits pet shops to see what specimens of wildlife are being offered for sale and he also checks on the trout fly factories.

"Most of the fly manufacturers are fine sportsmen themselves," he says. "They use animals or birds legally killed in this or another state for fly tieing.

"But every once in a while some fisherman makes some sort of a freak fly, finds that the trout bite at it at the time and then he gets ideas," Mazza adds ominously.

The freak may be made from the fur or feathers of something which is protected, he explains. Like one trout fisherman may decide that nothing will tempt a trout more than the fur from the left ear of a two-year-old Putnam County doe and he'll tell his friends and some trout fishermen being as enthusiastic as they are, the outcome is inevitable.

Mazza sees plenty of active fishermen in the course of his patrols. On a pleasant Sunday when the short stripes or moss bunkers are promising, he has counted more than a thousand along the Hudson shore.

He sees occasional wildlife alive on the city streets or in the park. The largest specimen was a fawn which an actress was leading along Fifth Avenue. He asked some questions, found out that the animal had been born on an animal farm and it was all legal. The actress got her picture in the newspapers. Mazza didn't. He hates publicity.

Once in awhile he'll come upon a tramp blue jay, a touring finch or a bewildered tropical bird which apparently lost its route map and became grounded on Manhattan. Usually he turns such migrants over to the Bronx Zoo which is very cooperative.

Sometimes he'll encounter a wandering goat. That's out of his department and the Department of Health or ASPCA is notified. "A goat," he explains, "is considered a domestic animal. Even in Manhattan."

Occasionally he'll meet up with a raccoon, skunk or possum. Animals such as these haven't ambled down to Manhattan on their own four paws. They've been raised as pets and either have escaped from their owners or have been released to shift for themselves.

When Mazza picks one up, he puts it in his car and takes it out of Manhattan, liberating it in a suitable place in the woods where it can revert to its natural life.

"Gives me a chance to see the woods," he says.

And this he likes fine.

—Emile C. Schurmacher

sexual abilities for any period of time.

Another outworn theory that continues to haunt many an active male, is the warning "watch out, or you'll run yourself dry." Dr. Wilhelm Stekel, a top pioneer in the field, answers this one beautifully. "The human seminal fluid cannot be hoarded," he says. "One who discharges it early in life, acquires the ability to be liberal even late in life. At any rate, he does not lose the ability. Again and again one hears the nursery fable, 'This one squandered his energies too early.' In truth, the abstinent one plays a very sad role in the bridal bed. In this matter too the adage "practice makes perfect," applies.

Many of us still cling to the idea that sex has a weakening influence because of the lassitude and occasional exhaustion that is felt immediately after intercourse. It is well known that athletes are severly restricted from sexual activity just before a major contest, and many a prizefighter has been accused of losing his stamina because of being too sweet on the women.

Actually, it is not the sex act itself which is weakening in such cases, but the kind of abnormally fast life that goes with it; overeating, at the wrong times, extra heavy drinking and lack of adequate rest all tend to dull the senses, lessen the excitement of lovemaking, and produce a hangover of aching muscles and jangled nerves.

Like any physical exercise, the sexual embrace can either knock you out or stimulate renewed vitality—depending on what condition you're in.

Muscle and brawn, by the way, is no safe index of sexual capacity. According to Dr. Kinsey "there is no invariable correlation" between a man's athletic abilities and his prowess with the ladies. "The list of top athletes" says this authority—and he has interviewed hundreds of them—"includes persons with both low and high rates of sexual outlet."

Another false notion—more up to date than the "overindulgence" fable—is the belief that too little intercourse can make you sick. This stems from the rightful recognition that sex is a natural appetite which should not be bottled up. Logical as it may sound, however, this is true only for a fractional percentage of mentally disturbed males and does not apply to the masculine population as a whole. If it did, there would not be enough hospitals in the country to care for the millions of single and married men who practice intercourse only several times a year.

It is true that the basic sex drive cannot be wholly frustrated without emotional, and often physical, damage. But nature, fortunately, finds her own solution to the problem. Dr.

Abraham Stone, one of our leading urologists, sums it up in this way, "It is rarely possible to dam up entirely the stream of sex desire; though intercourse may be avoided, other outlets—involuntary nocturnal emissions, masturbation, petting, homosexuality—often substitute for sexual intercourse for adolescent and adult males."

Dr. Kinsey's statistics show that at least 87 percent of men have masturbated at one time or another. And Dr. McCleod, in an interview with this writer, has stated that "true abstinence, involving no form of sexual outlet whatsoever, is a story book myth." He pointed out that, aside from direct physical release of semen, the human body has a safety valve mechanism that can take up excess that may accumulate in the sex gland during periods of abstinence.

To understand how this happens, let's take an intimate look at the most intimate organs we possess—the testicles. These oval shaped glands that are kept at below body temperature in the scrotal sac, measure about two inches in length and a little over an inch at the widest diameter. Each testis is composed of many layers of hair-thin tubules or cylinders which, measured end to end, would cover almost a thousand yards. These tiny tubules are the birthplace of the smallest, most magically potent cells in your body—the sperm cells. The average male kicks out between 400 and 800 *billion* of these reproductive cells every time he ejaculates! A large tube with a tongue-twisting name—the epididymis—acts as a storage reservoir for the spermatic fluid, or semen, which is being produced *constantly*, regardless of sexual desire. When this reservoir is filled to capacity, semen is usually released in a sexual act or a "wet dream," and a certain amount of excess is automatically reabsorbed into the tissues of the body, to be expelled with other debris and by-products no longer needed.

Thus the worry about being "poisoned" by pent-up semen is a fantastic fear without any basis in reality.

The virginal adult male, however, who may have so much fear of and distaste for sex that he tries to block all desire and all outlets, is definitely a sick person who ultimately pays for his conflicts by physical as well as emotional suffering. By setting up a state of chronic tension within himself, he creates the conditions for any one of a hundred nervous and organic disorders, from headaches to stomach upset to palpitations of the heart.

For those who try to follow the tradition of banishing sex throughout adult life, the use of ice packs, cold showers and vigorous exercise may offer momentary relief, but it cannot and will not work 24 hours a day. Nor are there any drugs that can completely and permanently squelch the basic sexual urge without doing injury to the body.

Among the various problems that continue to prey on the minds of normally-sexed males who should know hetter, two are worth mentioning. The first is the almost universal concern with premature ejaculation. Sex counselors report that at least 90 percent of men who come to them with this problem, have no conception of the normal time that it should take for the male partner to achieve orgasm (climax) during intercourse. If they did, they would stop worrying and might even give themselves a light pat on the back. Dr. Kinsey, who has gathered the most complete tabulation on this question, estimates that three-quarters of American males reach orgasm within two minutes, and that most of these do so in less than a minute, or 10 to 20 seconds after entrance. Dr. Stone thinks the average a bit longer, but the difference would be in seconds.

It is, of course, desirable that men learn to lengthen the act so that the female partner—who requires longer stimulation—can reach satisfaction. (Marriage manuals and counselors have very helpful advice to offer in this respect.)

A second big worry of sexually-healthy males is that their genital organs were designed several sizes too small. Ridicule by unthinking companions causes untold thousands of virile young men to dodge normal sexual encounters with the opposite sex; too many males shun marriage, convinced that nature has robbed them of the minimum apparatus.

For most masculine adults, this feeling of inferiority about the size of their sex organs is utterly without foundation. Doctors tell us that nine out of 10 men who complain that they are "too small" are physiologically as capable of performing the act of intercourse as are their more generously-endowed neighbors.

The vagina, or female organ, is a flexible canal that accommodates itself readily to the erect male member. Birth control clinics estimate that the vagina averages four inches in depth from the point of entrance to the cervix or mouth of the womb. This means that the male organ need measure no more than four to four and a half inches erect for successful relations to be completed. In some instances where failure persists, personal sex counseling with both the partners may correct the situation.

There are no known methods for enlarging the penis, and nothing but wind behind the old wives' tale that excessive masturbation or intercourse serves to magnify the male organ.

The same goes for the thousand and one aphrodisiacs and "youth restorers" that are supposed to increase man's sexual capacity. Medical specialists agree that there is no reliable food, drug, potion or gadget for improving one's love life. Like all faith cures, aphrodisiacs may sometimes help, but in such cases it is the takers' own mind, and not the product, that helps him along. The famous "Spanish fly" or cantharides, a caustic powder made up of dried pulverized beetles, does cause momentary excitation by inflaming the uro-genital passages. But it is highly injurious and has caused several deaths. By damaging the internal tissues of the penis and urinary system, the long term effect of Spanish fly is to lower instead of heighten natural sexual capacity.

Every man has it in his power to take inventory of his own sexual capacities and to guide himself accordingly. How? By using a little common sense, based on modern scientific knowledge. Here are a few guideposts:

Learn your own sex needs and try to fulfill them—not somebody else's. Remember that if you need it three times daily or only once a month—assuming of course that you're in fair health—you are as normal as the next guy.

Desire is a sure sign of need; try to answer that desire as spontaneously as the situation may permit. Erection without desire, desire without erection, means something's wrong in your environment, your relationship or yourself. Odds are it's a minor problem, but do something about it, starting first with your doctor.

Avoid the "now it's Thursday" routine. Mere habit can't substitute for desire, but it can kill desire. Don't forget that your needs may vary—with the season, with age, or physical or emotional condition. The important thing is to keep the act alive, fresh, exciting.

If you're convinced you can do better, find out why you aren't. Look for the first thing that's bothering you—health, fatigue, dollar worries, the job—and try to solve it or take it in stride. If this fails, ask yourself some head-on questions. Am I afraid of sex? Do I lack self-confidence? Does my sex partner really attract me? Facing such questions will give you the courage to make a change, or to go for help.

One good way to know whether you're pacing yourself right is to judge your state *after* the act. If you drift off into a soft easy languor, then everything's splendid. But the feeling of being utterly drained out means that you are either taking too much of a good thing or that you are run down physically. This is especially true if, on the day following intercourse, you continue to feel fagged out and irritable.

Finally, it's quality, not quantity, that counts in sex life. If the first is achieved, the second may increase. Don't ever approach the act as something you *ought* to do for your own good, like eating when you aren't hungry. In sex, the appetite is all important—even if it means starving a little. Your first step to success will be your mounting hunger. •

The Case of the HAMMY MURDERESS

Poor Clara was happy only when her name was in the papers. She almost started a Honduran revolution struggling to get back to serve a murder sentence—and get into print again

BY ALAN HYND

Illustrated by Tom Lovell

In 1922, Los Angeles served as the production center for several outstanding histrionic performances that originated not in the film studios but at coroners' inquests and in courtrooms and hoosegows. These performances were fulsomely reported in the daily press for all, and particularly for Clara Phillips, to read.

William Desmond Taylor, the movie director who collected pink nightgowns with girls in them, was done in one evening in his bungalow after having cocktails with Mabel Normand, a big star who loved to shell peanuts. Thereafter Miss Normand and a dozen or more assorted studio celebrities and law-enforcement big shots hammed it for many months for the benefit of inquest audiences, peasants from Iowa gawking into the D. A.'s offices and the cross-your-legs lads from the newspaper darkrooms. Clara Phillips didn't miss a line of it.

In the same year, a stunningly beautiful 29-year-old divorcee and one-time student in a drama academy, Mrs. Madalynne Obenchain, tripped gaily from the wings to go on trial on the charge of having instigated the demise of a suitor, Belton Kennedy, after having induced him to take her to a lonely lodge, not for the reason that may suggest itself but, according to Mrs. Obenchain, so that she could look under a rock for a penny she had hidden there some years previously.

Mrs. Obenchain wrote embarrassing poetry for the newspapers while awaiting trial and fell into an incandescent correspondence with a fellow prisoner. She put up a brave front during her ordeal and was captivating and photogenic as she registered various emotions, ranging from high tragedy to low comedy.

"The Case of the Hammy Murderess" is a Cavalier bonus reprint. Copyright, 1949, Fawcett Publications, Inc.

Wo[illegible] with freshly-baked cak[illegible]s and several male morons with flowers were waiting at the station when the new heroine arrived. Clara waved to them then left for the county jail.

Her discarded ex-husband, Ralph Obenchain, an attorney on the staff of a big insurance company in Chicago and known to his coworkers as "steady" but to Los Angeles newspapers as "the human doormat," quit his job to fly to the side of his former mate, there to offer her, with gestures, the twin attractions of free counsel and remarriage. The lady, reluctant to share billing with a costar, declined. Mrs. Obenchain was tried twice, achieving a hung jury each time, and then turned loose. Clara Phillips couldn't wait to get every last detail on this one.

Clara Phillips was, like Madalynne Obenchain, a product of nondescript people from the Midwest. She was dark, pretty and dimpled and had a low boiling point. She won wide male approval by what she put into a pair of stockings, a tight skirt and a sweater. She was, at various stages of her career, a stenographer, a clerk in a department store and a chorus girl in fourth-rate road companies of musical hits. It was Clara's experience that advancement in the theater was predicated not so much by what she did on the stage as by what she was willing to do off it.

Like so many girls who don't make the grade as actresses, Clara settled for a husband, Armour Phillips, a strapping big oil-stock salesman.

The very thing that had brought Clara and Armour together was, in 1922, five years after their marriage, pulling them apart. Armour was skirt happy.

It wasn't that Clara, now 26, was in love with Armour any longer; she just didn't want anybody else to have him. It hurt her pride to think some other girl had something she didn't have, or was making better use of what she had.

In the summer of 1922, Clara learned that Armour's new love was a big widow named Mrs. Alberta Meadows who worked as a clerk in a downtown Los Angeles branch bank. Armour, whose hobby was promoting money, had met Mrs. Meadows while trying to put the bite on the bank.

Next, Clara came upon some travel folders among Armour's effects. Her husband was projecting a trip around the world with Mrs. Meadows! Clara had just one close woman friend—a young matron named Peggy Caffee who had once been a show girl with her.

"I'm having trouble with Armour again," Clara told Peggy.

"The usual trouble?"

"Uh-huh. He's planning to take her on a trip around the world. He must of sold somebody a lot of stock."

"You goin' to take that layin' down?" asked Peggy.

"You're damned right I ain't."

Next afternoon, Clara and Peggy confronted the widow Meadows when she left work for the day.

"We want to talk to you," Clara said.

"What about?" asked Mrs. Meadows.

"About my husband," said Clara.

"Oh," said Mrs. Meadows. "Where will we talk?"

"Let's take a ride—in your car."

Mrs. Meadows drove Clara and Peggy, at Clara's suggestion, to a desolate eminence that afforded a fine view of the countryside. Clara and Mrs. Meadows got out of the car, but remained within earshot of Peggy.

"I want you to stay away from my husband," said Clara.

"Why," said Mrs. Meadows, "I didn't realize that you wanted him. I understood you were through with him."

"Did *he* tell you that?"

"Of course; otherwise I would never have gone out with him."

"Well, I do want him, and I don't want you seeing him any more."

"If that's how things are, Mrs. Phillips," said Mrs. Meadows, "I'll never see Armour again."

The two women got back into the car. "It's all settled," Clara said to Peggy.

Peggy sniffed. "Are you goin' to let her get away with those lies? You goin' to take this layin' down, Clara?"

"You're damned right I ain't!"

Armour Phillips was sitting around the $25-a-month bungalow that he and Clara shared, wondering where his wife was and, more to the point, where chow was. Clara walked in at dusk. Her eyes were dark and hot and she wore a fixed smile. Her clothes were flicked with blood.

"Something terrible has happened," she told her husband in the most civil tone she had used to him in weeks.

"What has happened?" asked Armour.

"I killed her."

"Who? Alberta?"

"Uh-huh."

"You *did*?"

"Uh-huh."

Both Clara and Armour were rabid movie fans. It is conceivable that their behavior was conditioned by how they had seen movie characters behave.

"What are you going to do?" asked Armour.

"I'm awful tired," said Clara. "I think I'll go to bed."

"You better wash that blood off your dress," said the man to the woman who had just killed his mistress.

Armour went outside and noticed that Clara had driven home in Mrs. Meadows' car. He was shocked to learn that his wife was a car thief. After a quick bite, Clara, at Armour's suggestion, drove the Ford to Pomona, a suburb, and abandoned it there. Armour, following, drove Clara back to Los Angeles and checked her into a roach trap near the Santa Fe station. "I'll get some jack," he said, "and get you off to Mexico in the morning."

Clara seemed a trifle disappointed. She had planned to give herself up in the morning. Madalynne Obenchain had hogged the spotlight long enough.

Armour put Clara on a train for El Paso. "When you get there," he said, "just go across the bridge and you'll be in Mexico." Armour had learned from some oil-stock promoters that the United States did not have an extradition treaty with Mexico. He handed Clara a morning newspaper. "There's a piece on the front page," he said. "They found the body but they don't know who it is yet."

Armour bought a paper for himself and read about the murder. Alberta Meadows had had her brains bashed in by the head of a hammer, been disemboweled by the claw end and then had had a 40-pound boulder rolled on her. That, Armour reflected, was just like Clara. Always overdoing it.

Armour walked the streets for a couple of hours. Suddenly he was aware that he was feeling sorry for himself. In a little while, he found himself in the office of a friend who practiced law.

"Suppose," said Armour to the mouthpiece, posing a problem of a hypothetical friend, "a man knows his wife has murdered somebody and he keeps his mouth shut and helps her get away. What can happen to him?"

"He could go to prison as an accessory after the fact."

The lawyer quickly divined that Armour's hypothetical friend was Armour. He blabbed to the sheriff.

Clara, nailed in Tucson, returned to Los Angeles to find herself a celebrity.

Women who had sweated over hot stoves were at the railroad station with freshly baked cakes for the new heroine, and several male morons were on hand with flowers. Clara, whom somebody had called the "Tiger Lady," smiled prettily to the audience, waved and then departed for the county jail.

In the great audience watching Clara's performance was a fellow named Jesse Carson—a half-baked soldier of fortune—who was, at the moment, loitering in Southern California between adventures. Carson was a sun-tanned, big eager beaver who, whatever the quality of his mind, proved himself to have a strong back. He was sitting in a lunch wagon when he happened to see this impartial appraisal of Armour Phillips by a Hearst sobbie:

To think that all this mess could possibly occur on account of Clara's husband! It doesn't seem possible that any woman as bright as Clara could have consid-

ered him worth all that agony. To me he looked just a mediocre sort of chump, a not-too-bright mechanic in his best clothes, appearing to be immeasurably impressed by the important role he happened to have in the proceedings.

Carson showed up at the inquest. He sat silent and grim-lipped, like William S. Hart, the strong mute man of the horse operas, as Peggy Caffee, divulging the details of the murder, gave her friend, the Tiger Lady, a great big shove toward San Quentin. As Clara was being led back to jail, Carson, who, like all soldiers of fortune, seemed to have either been born or raised in Texas, appeared alongside her and murmured to Clara, "Never mind, ma'am. Ah'll rescue you from all this. You just a-wait and see." Carson, too, was a flicker addict.

At the trial, hardly anybody paid any attention to the evidence. Alberta Meadows, the victim, had become an all-but-forgotten woman. Everybody knew that Clara had bashed in somebody's head. So what? The thing that mattered was how the Tiger Lady, Los Angeles' own, would conduct herself.

Clara was smartly turned out in a tight-fitting suit for the scene. She crossed her legs as if she were sitting on the rail of an incoming ship rather than a murderess in a witness box.

Speaking about the crime for the first time since her arrest, Clara did so with chic confidence. She admitted having been at the murder scene, but as a spectator, not a participant. Peggy, it seemed, and not Clara, had brained, disemboweled and rolled the big boulder on top of Mrs. Meadows' body.

"How would you boys like a nice, big, tall mug of ice-cold water?"

Clara then began to slough off the hammer. She and Peggy had been passing a five-to-50-cent store in Long Beach one day and had noticed cute little hammers in the window. "I think I'll get one of them for protection," said Peggy.

When the fight with Mrs. Meadows started, Peggy brought out her little hammer, struck one blow after another, disemboweled the corpse, rolled the boulder on it and then, according to Clara, made a not-inconsequential contribution to the gallery of understatements by observing, "Something tells me Alberta Meadows will never steal another man."

The D. A.'s gumshoes were able to trace the hammer to the store where Clara claimed Peggy had bought it. Nobody there, however, could recall either Peggy or Clara as having ever been in the store. Peggy had to be restrained when she indicated she did not intend to take Clara's story.

Clara got 10 years to life in San Quentin, possibly because the jury could find no way under the law of letting her off with a moderate fine. Defense Counsel Harrington, looking down his nose at everybody, said he'd appeal.

One night in December, a face appeared outside the bars in Clara's cell. It belonged to Jesse Carson. Carson had leaped from roof to roof of some adjoining buildings *a la* Douglas Fairbanks, then made the roof of the county jail and let himself down to a ledge in front of Clara's window. "Ah love you, ma'am," he whispered. Then, to show his sincerity, he whipped out a long saw.

Clara and Carson fled north to Redlands. There they tarried just long enough for Clara—about to play one of the most dramatic episodes in her saga—to disguise herself. She bleached her dark hair, put on a pair of smoked glasses and entrained with Carson for St. Louis.

It was now February, 1923, and a young Examiner reporter named Morris Lavine came into the picture. Lavine had, all along, been disenchanted with Clara Phillips, with the public's adoration of her and with the ineffectuality of the authorities in finding out where she was.

Lavine had studied Clara at her trial. She was a very stubborn young woman; she hated to be thwarted. Since she had been thwarted in a move to get to Mexico, it would be just like her to make for Mexico again.

Lavine had studied Armour Phillips, too. Armour was just the kind of bozo who would help Clara so that he could regard himself as a movie hero come to life.

Lavine knew a fellow who worked in the bank where Armour had an account. Armour had received a big commission on an oil-stock sale in November. In December and January he had made three withdrawals totaling about $1,000.

The Examiner's correspondent in Mexico City advised Lavine that amounts tallying with Armour's withdrawals in Los Angeles had been received at the Bank of Montreal's branch in Mexico City by Jesse Carson. Here indeed was movie behavior—the husband sending dough to the other man so that the other man could get farther away with the wife.

Lavine got the Department of Justice to joggle the Mexican cops into locating Clara and Carson and trying to persuade them to come back. The Mexican cops were sorry, but the travelers had gone to Guatemala City.

The reporter wired Guatemala City authorities. They wired back that Clara and Carson had gone to Honduras.

Lavine called on the Honduras consul in Los Angeles and demanded action. Next day he was advised that Clara had been arrested in the capital, Tegucigalpa.

Honduras was, at that time, ripe for another national revolt. The political parties of Honduras could, when the occasion demanded, create issues out of anything bigger than a man's hand.

Clara, sitting on a sort of second-floor balcony in the capital city's police station, was certainly bigger than a man's hand. Actually, Clara wasn't occupying a cell at all but the quarters of an assistant chief of police. The chief himself had his orders from a Honduran political big shot who had happened to be in the lobby of the Agurcia Hotel when Clara checked in. His orders relating to Clara were, "Give her the very best."

A request for Clara's extradition finally came through the American minister in Tegucigalpa. The loyal opposition to the political party in power, or the underground, immediately seized upon the request of the United States as the issue it needed to overthrow the government. Was little Honduras to lose its face by acceding to the whim of the United States to imprison a lady who had, in the final analysis, done nothing more than settle a family disagreement?

[*Continued on page 47*]

The two convicts trapped in the tree knew that their climb meant sure capture by the guards, but it gave them a break from the pursuit of the relentless dogs.

Them Damned Dogs

There's just one sure way to escape the four-legged manhunters they breed down Texas way—and no convict has had the guts to try it yet

by Dev Klapp

The two men broke from the thicket onto the bank of a shallow creek. They were sweating and gasping for breath, their clothes torn by thorns into tatters of rough white ducking, mud-stained and filthy.

The men stood where they were for a moment, drooping and utterly spent. One man nodded toward the stream and they both fell flat on their bellies to greedily suck great gulps of the cool water. When they had drunk their fill, the men relaxed, resting tired muscles.

Then, from a distance, came the clear notes of a baying hound. At the sound both men leaped to their feet, wild fear twisting their features.

"Them dogs! Them damned dogs!" one of the pair sobbed.

His companion plunged into the shin-deep water. "Let's go!" he urged. "Don't just stand there! We'll wade downstream."

The other man shook his head hopelessly. "It ain't no use, Joe. I'm bushed."

His partner waded ashore and stood beside him. "Reckon you're right. Them dogs is too smart for a trick like that."

An expression of cruelty crossed his face. He pulled a crudely fashioned knife from beneath his prison jumper and cried venomously, "I'm a-gonna send a couple of the devils to hell before the law takes us back!"

The baying grew nearer. As the ominous notes rang through the thicket, the men began to tremble. But now both held knives and stood back to back, waiting.

Suddenly, a big raw-boned hound bounded into the open, with lolling tongue and pale, gleaming eyes. Another followed, then another, and another, until there were five lean dogs warily circling the frightened men. Barking and growling, the hounds made quick, darting attacks, to be parried by swift thrusts of the gleaming knives.

"We ought to have clumb a tree," one man complained bitterly. "We ain't got a chance!"

"Damned if I'm gonna roost like a buzzard for no dog!" his companion answered viciously. Then, "I got him!" as he sank a knife blade in the neck of a leaping hound.

The dog spun about and fell heavily to the ground, kicking away its life. The other dogs became more cautious.

A second hound fell with a stab wound through the lung. But the fugitive convicts were in trouble, too. One had a deep gash in his thigh that stained the rough cloth of his prison trousers with a widening circle of red. His companion, while parrying the leap of an attacking dog, had suffered even more hurt. A slice of bloody flesh hung from his forearm, ripped loose by the hounds gleaming teeth.

The battle was ebbing when a mounted man broke through the brush, a revolver held steadily in his hand.

A dog-training problem begins with a simulated escape. The dogs pick up the scent at the bottom of the fence . . .

. . . and take off on the trail of the quarries. Many ingenious tricks have been tried to throw the dogs off . . .

"Drop those knives!" he snapped, his voice crackling with authority.

The bloody knives clattered to the ground, and the mounted man replaced the gun with a leather whip which he popped as a signal to the dogs. Instantly, the surviving three lost all interest in their quarry and wandered a short distance away and lay down. The chase, for them, was over! They had finished their job!

This was just one of many prison breaks thwarted by Huntsville's swift, keen "bloodhounds." But these dogs of the Texas Prison System don't look like bloodhounds —and they aren't. At least not a hundred percent. In their blood is a dab of redbone and a dash of Walker foxhound to give them long running legs. However, the keen noses of their bloodhound forebears have been carefully preserved. Crossbreeds they are, and unsurpassed for the grim work they are called upon to do in their line of duty.

Pure-bred bloodhounds are excellent dogs, and there are regrettably few of them left today. Some are still used in prison work here and there, but for great, sprawling Texas, with its vast distances, bloodhounds would prove too slow. Then, too, their dispositions are too gentle. They could never hold desperate men for the following lawmen.

But the crossbreeds fill the bill. So well do they combine the good points of their ancestors that the prisoners hate them far more intensely than they do the armed guards that walk the prison walls; for escaping convicts realize that if they aren't able to put plenty of distance between themselves and the prison before the dogs are set on their trail, they're as good as caught.

Because of this, men figuring on making a try for a "brush pardon" plan long and carefully. And then they usually secure knives or weapons of some sort for the dogs.

One guy who thought he had the dog problem solved

Now the real thing has come up. Three men have escaped and have a good start. The dogs are checked, then turned loose.

. . . but only one works. These two "prisoners" are trying one popular, but seldom successful defense—cold steel.

The escapees have surrendered and the dogs subside as the "pop-off" signal, a simple crack of a leather whip, is given.

was a gent named Marty Morrison (at least that was one of the man's many aliases). So confident was he in fact, that he didn't bother to arm himself, though it is doubtful whether this would have helped him, anyway.

Morrison's break started one cool spring morning in 1946 at Wynne Prison Farm, near Huntsville, Texas. The working gangs were already in the fields and the ever-present guards were keeping close watch over them.

Marty's guard was a man called Eagle Eye, a tanned, restive man of 50, who never relaxed his vigilance. But Monty had prepared for that. It had cost him $5 in bribes, but if things worked out, it would be money well spent.

All morning, beady-eyed, tough-as-a-pineknot Marty had kept an eye on his guard. Marty was doing life as a habitual, and his only hope lay in what was about to take place.

He'd completed his arrangements in the mess hall that morning and every added second's delay made his nerves jangle. All he could do was wait for the right time.

Marty's plan was simple. He intended to "jump the gun," make a beeline to Huntsville and pick up a car some friends had waiting for him at a filling station. The success of his venture depended on two factors—getting away from Eagle Eye, and gaining enough time to put into operation his scheme to outwit the prison dogs.

He was working close to an 18-man squad, hoeing vegetables. The next nearest group was a half-mile away. The bloodhounds were with this latter bunch and Marty figured that was distance enough for him.

With no apparent motive, Marty's squad moved closer to a nearby wire fence still under Eagle Eye's sharp surveillance. Reaching the wire, the squad bunched. Eagle Eye sat his mount easily, watching, watching, his gun butt on a thigh, the barrel pointing skyward.

Then, according to the plan, the scrap began! Two

The convicts were quickly tracked down and their knives did them little good. The dogs were too many and too tough.

convicts started a slugfest. They cursed and pounded each other with heavy fists. One staggered under a hard right to the heart, but came back with an ugly swing of his own. Eagle Eye's jaw jutted forth. He kicked the dun with a heel and brought his gun down to level. "Break it up!" he snapped.

But for one crucial moment Eagle Eye forgot Marty!

And that moment was what the clever con was watching for. He plummeted across the fence and ran for a pine thicket. His heart pounded with fear and his skin tightened up and down his back as he waited for the hot sting of buckshot from Eagle Eye's gun. But it didn't come and on he plunged, the noise of his flight covered by the racket made by the battling convicts and the shouts of his squad.

When Marty had covered 300 yards and there were no shots, he knew he had made it. Looking over his shoulder, he saw nothing but trees and grass—and now he was out of range of that terrible gun.

He had put a good half-mile between himself and his squad when he heard two spaced shots. That would be Eagle Eye summoning the dog-boy from the far field. But before they could get organized for a chase he would have plenty of time to fool those damned mutts.

Marty headed straight for a nearby Negro settlement. On the way he dived through briars and scrambled under barbed-wire fences to make the chase even more difficult for the mounted pursuers. It was rough going and took more time than he had figured on. But finally the first of the rough, unpainted shacks came into view. It was empty.

Marty raced through this shanty, in the front door and out the back. Now he could hear the dogs behind him, toward the farm, as they took the trail. His heart twisted in sudden panic. But he quickly calmed its wild beating with the logic of his next move.

Marty meant for the dogs to smell many people, to mix up his scent with that of other humans. So he raced toward another shack, this time occupied. Crashing through the flimsy door he glimpsed a Negro boy and a girl seated at a pine table. Their eyes widened in fear as he shot past them and leaped from the back porch, twisting and winding toward another house.

Marty went through two more houses like he had the first. By now the Negroes were milling around, just as he had figured. They were wiping out his scent.

Next in his path was a cow lot with several milk cows chewing their cuds in the shade. Over the fence Marty leaped. He wallowed through every spot of manure he could find, before climbing the far fence to vanish in a stand of scrub oak. Now let the damned dogs figure *that* out!

Coming out on a hill, he turned to watch the pursuing dogs' discomfiture. He was just in time to see three hounds race through the empty cabin.

The dogs didn't stop. Right through the second cabin they went, and out, the Negro boy and girl two jumps ahead, and yelling like sixty. But the dogs paid the frightened pair no mind. Without a pause they ran through two other houses and into a field, weaving in and out between the legs of running men and women.

When Marty saw the dogs heading toward the cow lot, he felt his first discouragement. He had banked so much on his master plan—but the dogs wouldn't play his way. Who in hell, Marty had thought, would ever think any mutt, no matter how good, could separate his tracks from those of a half-hundred confused Negroes? His whole escape had been built on that premise.

The cowlot held them but a moment. They milled around a bit, until one big black and tan bitch conceived the idea of running around to the far side of the lot.

Marty heard the bitch's bay of triumph when she picked up his manure-tainted spoor, and knew that his race was run. So, mouthing oaths of frustration, he climbed a nearby sapling and waited. The guards found him there 10 minutes later, a hunched figure perched 10 feet above three eager, cross-bred prison hounds.

If you are on the right end of a chase it's a pretty sight watching these highly-trained man-hunters work. In most escapes, the dog-sergeants lead the dogs to the spot at which the con was last seen. The dogs need no command to go. When released, they take the trail at once, running with heads stretched forward, tongues lolling. They don't "nose" out a hot trail, but take it from the air and the bushes. As they run they "open" again and again. Experienced dog-men know each dog's voice. They know when the dogs "make a lose" by the silence. When the hounds pick up the scent once more, they open up at once, triumphantly.

However, the chase is no sport. It is dangerous work. Even the dogs sense this fact. All during their training period they are taught to expect a fight at the trail's end—to look for flashing knives, iron bars or wooden clubs. They have no defense, though, should their quarry be armed with a gun. Entire packs have been killed trying to hold at bay some pistol-packing con, before the dog-sergeant arrived.

The training of these carefully-bred dogs is rigorous, and interesting. Naturally gentle and friendly, they must be taught to fight from early puppyhood. To train them thus, the pups are put on the trail of a trusty once each day. Day by day the runs become longer and the time interval until unleashing greater.

All during this training period the pups find slaps and cuffs waiting for them at the end of the trail. At first the rowdy fight is just a game. Then stinging switches are substituted and it is no longer play-time.

They are ready now to join the pack of older dogs, where they learn to watch for backtracks, for skips in the trail, circles, figure eights, and all the other tricks an escaping convict might use to throw them off the scent. They grasp the fact also that this man-scent can somehow change to that of a mule or a horse—or even a cow, but that sooner or later this scent will change back to the one they started out on.

And they learn about streams. They get to know that if a man enters a river and his scent can't be found coming out on the near side, their quarry has crossed to the far bank. For this reason, a convict wastes his time wading up or down a stream trying to throw the pursuing pack off his trail, for it never succeeds.

One final thing is taught these potential man-hunters. That is that whenever all else becomes too puzzling, the dog-sergeant will be along directly to unravel the whole thing for them.

Great care is used in breeding these Texas Prison hounds. Only proven specimens of tough backwoods hounds are used. And, unlike the bloodhound, they can be taught to be savage fighters.

A man's station in life means nothing to these wise man-trackers. Sometimes they make better detectives than their human counterparts.

Once when a Texas drug store was broken into, this trait was exemplified by the dogs from the nearby prison. Straight as a surveyor's line they raced across the street to mill and leap and bay before the gate of the town's most respected spinster. Hearing the commotion out front, a servant opened the front door for a look-see just as the gate was unlatched and the dogs ran through. Right past the servant and into the house the hounds went. When the law arrived a moment later, the dogs had the old lady "treed" atop the dining room table. Seeing this, the following crowd hooted its derision at such stupid mutts.

As the dogs were pulled off, the spinster fainted in the rescuing sheriff's arms. Upon being brought to and spying the dogs nearby, the old lady shrank back in terror and promptly confessed.

It turned out that the lady was a narcotic addict and had broken into the store to replenish her supply. Not one person in town would have connected her with the robbery, for she was too respected. But to those dogs she was just another "scent."

And "scent" is what these manhunters depend upon. Once this man-smell is killed the dogs are helpless. The convicts know this and all sorts of tricks are devised to bamboozle the hounds, but none has proved entirely successful, so far. Some escapees have sprayed their back trail with under-arm deodorant. Others have tried red-pepper, asafetida, high-life and many weird concoctions to throw pursuing dogs off the trail.

We've been told that there is one sure-fire method of outsmarting the dogs. If an escapee will lie down and remain absolutely still, the dogs will sniff around his body, maybe growl a time or two, then go off and take a snooze. Then, when the dogs fall asleep, the con can get up and sneak away, unmolested.

The late Buck Flanagan, a manager at Central Prison Farm for 40 years, once said that he had seen this happen, though he admitted "it takes more nerve than I've got."

No better compliment can be paid these efficient man-hunters than for a fleeing prisoner to turn and shake his fist at the ominous baying along his back trail and call out in frustration: "Them dogs! Them damned dogs!" •

I CATCH WILD HORSES

Continued from page 22

shaped something like a shovel blade. The entrance is where the handle comes up out of the blade and it's anywhere from 25 to 100 yards wide. Usually it's placed right on a horse trail. At the "point" end is a small pen for collecting the captured horses. Fenceposts have to be camouflaged with sagebrush.

The traps have to be sturdy. Sometimes a stallion will get excited and ram into the wire at full speed. I've seen 10 to 15 horses run a fence. Down it goes, and in a split second they're galloping for the horizon. Funny thing about desert horses, they rarely try to jump a fence. Once a band finds itself in a trap, they wheel around and try to get back through the entrance. The idea is to close off the mouth as quickly as possible.

In some of the corrals we use for aerial operations, I have a runway leading right up to the entrance. The pilot lands on it and actually chases the horses in.

I have seven corrals in the Red desert now, and with an airplane driving the horses I can cover the area pretty well. But before the roundups took to the air we had to use every dirty, dangerous trick we could think of.

One trick was to rope the horses at waterholes.

I'd wait until the horses were filled up and heavy with water. Then I'd touch spurs to my mount and we'd come exploding out of the night. The wild horses would scatter into the darkness and we'd go galloping hellbent after them.

I'd try to rope a horse as quickly as possible because after he'd run a half mile the water would shake down in his belly and he'd outrun a saddlehorse. I guess what I did was mostly by instinct because I couldn't see a thing. When my ears told me were right behind a horse I'd throw my rope blind. If I heard a squeal and a grunt, I'd know I had caught something.

That's when the fun started. My rope was made fast to the saddle horn. Chances are when the wild horse hit the end of the rope, both he and my horse would go flying head over wicked heels through the air. To avoid getting thrown, I'd jump.

A fellow said to me once: "You're going to get killed jumping off your horse that way."

I told him: "I'll get killed for sure if I stay on."

One night I took after a big horse that looked like a beauty. We raced nearly eight miles in the moonlight before I could get my rope on him, but I couldn't drag him into the corral. Finally I hobbled him and crawled into the sack. Next morning I went out to see what kind of horse I'd caught. He was a splendid chestnut animal—with a brand burned clearly into his hip.

One day I chased a stallion and roped him. When I jumped, the bridle rein broke. Both horses ran off, leaving me afoot 15 miles from water and with a blazing sun overhead. The rope must have been choking the stallion because he'd have to rest frequently. But every time I tried to sneak up, he'd start off. My horse hadn't been trained to stand still so he'd just trot after the stallion.

I circled the pair and got them started on the trail back to camp. I knew that if they stayed on the trail, they'd have to cross a draw. I figured that in stepping over the draw my horse would get the rope caught under his front leg. Then he'd be afraid he'd get tangled up and would stand still. The rope did get under him and he refused to budge.

All captured horses were kept in a corral until I was ready to take them into Wamsutter. We didn't truck them in those days. We drove them in.

Mares and colts will stay close together but the stallions are the ones that need educating. To herd-break a stallion I'd catch him, double up one front leg and tie it in that position with a soft rope. I'd chase him around a while inside the corral to show that I could outrun him. After a bit he'd get tired and the leg would become numb. Then I'd rope him again. By then, he knew I was boss.

Even then the drives were pretty hairy affairs. We'd point the herd toward town and let the horses go. One man rode in front to keep them headed in the right direction. Another man brought up the rear. They always took off at a dead run.

We'd get into some trouble almost every drive. Some herds were so wild they wouldn't go under a powerline. And it seems that every time we had an especially skittish bunch, a train would come by Wamsutter.

The drive I remember best is the one I made right after I'd been kicked in the leg. I heard a bone snap, and the leg had turned black and was badly swollen.

I fixed a sling and rode on just one stirrup. Before we had gone five miles the stirrup broke. I had to ride like a dude for another five miles, bouncing the dust out of my pants with every jump. When we finally got the horses slowed down I crawled off and fixed the stirrup.

Eventually we got the horses corralled and I rode over to the bar for some ice. The nearest doctor was 100 miles away, and I wanted to ease the pain before I started on the drive to see him.

A couple of hours later the leg looked fine. After that I didn't see any sense going to the doctor so I rode back to camp. Next day, though, I discovered the leg wasn't much good for running. It buckled when I tried and I fell flat on my face. For six weeks after that, every time I went out to the corral, I ran on my hands and one good leg.

When you're riding over rough country there's always the danger of the horse falling on you. If you're hurt when you're alone, chances are you'll never make it back. I remember once a horse got mean and rolled on me. One leg was under him and it felt numb. I held the horse down by the saddlehorn. Slowly, I uncinched the saddle, got a good grip on the bridle and let him get up easy. Luckily the leg was okay.

The only scars I carry from my business are a couple of stub fingers. Back in November of 1938 I went out to move a wild stallion from a corral to a pasture. I dropped a noose over his head. He took off but slammed to a stop when the slack ran out. There was a kink in the rope and I caught my mitten in the loop. When I got it freed I found one finger neatly amputated. A second finger was hanging. I took out my knife and finished the job, then wrapped a handkerchief around the stubs, put my hand in the mitten, and finished taking the stallion down to the pasture. I melted some snow to put in the radiator of my car, then we started for Casper, 120 miles away.

My fingers finally quit bleeding but my biggest worry was getting the car stuck and freezing to death.

The doctor wanted me to go to the hospital for anesthesia. I told him I had to get back to the horse camp, and besides I didn't like the smell of the stuff. So he trimmed the stubs and sewed them up.

Sometimes people ask me why I'm in the wild horse business. It's because I like it. Believe it or not, I love horses. The unfortunate part of it is that there is no room anywhere today for wild horses. They're eating grass that should be going to fatten cattle and sheep.

In some places cattlemen have machine gunned wild horses to get rid of them. In other places they've even been bombed. I can see no reason for killing the animals. It isn't necessary.

Back when we were driving them with saddlehorses, maybe one-fourth of the horses in a band would die before we got them to the railroad. Fat horses would be run to death. Colts would be separated from their mothers and left to starve. Others would get skinned up and die.

In contrast, we rounded up more than 1,000 horses by air at one of our corrals this last year. We had only two deaths.

The best of the wild horses I capture go as breeding stock. Ranchers buy others to break for saddlehorses. Many go into rodeo strings. The 4-Fs of the equine world go to Los Angeles to be butchered for human consumption.

Most of the 15,000 horses I've captured have been just plain nags. But there are a few that stand out in my memory. The most unforgettable one was a perfect palomino I named Desert Dust, the most publicized horse in Wyoming.

We caught Desert Dust in 1946. He was five years old at the time and had been seen and watched ever since he'd been foaled. Scores of men had tried to capture him. We ran him and nine mares into a corral with a plane. Then I took him to my Glenrock ranch and let him run in a 10-acre pasture with some pinto mares. Every offspring was a perfect palomino.

Desert Dust was the star of the widely

YOU CAN BUILD THIS HOME WORKBENCH

A good workbench is essential for the workshop you are going to set up, and it is almost impossible to buy a serviceable one these days, except at a fancy price. A recent tour of leading New York hardware stores disclosed only a few benches, ranging in price from $29.95 to $45. The workbench shown here can be built by any man capable of handling a saw, hammer and drill, at a cost of $20 to $25, based on current lumber prices. The original bench was built in 1940 and it is as sturdy as a rock after 13 years of usage.

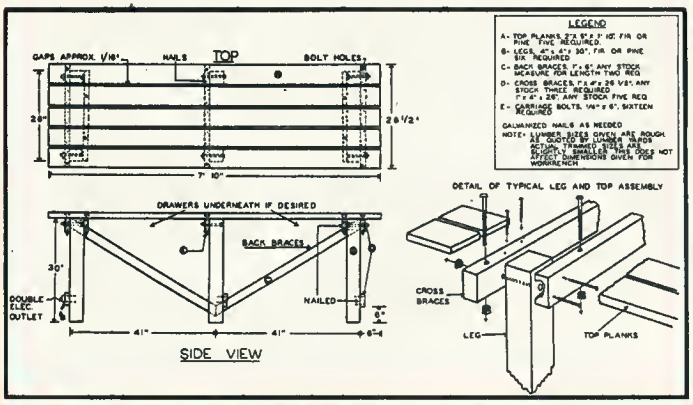
Big enough for all ordinary work, even with an electric motor, with a grinding head and hefty vise mounted on top (it once held a lathe), it is also strong enough to withstand any amount of pounding. The top is purposely left rough, so that you can nail jigs to it, spill paint on it, use clamps on it, or bang hell out of it with hammer or chisel without worrying about spoiling its appearance. Furthermore, this workbench can be disassembled in 10 minutes for moving or storing, an advantage of its carriage-bolt construction. It comes apart in four sections; the top and three sets of legs, plus two back braces. The assembled bench weighs about 200 pounds, and that's all solid. There is ample space under the top for drawers, if you want them, and lumber up to eight feet long may be stored on top of the lower cross braces.

Standard-sized lumber is used throughout the construction—a list of sizes appears in the legend accompanying the drawing below. Have the lumber yard cut the various pieces to correct length, or do it yourself with a crosscut saw. Slight variations in dimensions make no difference—in fact, you can build the bench larger or smaller according to your requirements, as long as you keep the general proportions about the same; do not alter the height, 31¾ inches, however, as this is especially convenient for working either while standing or sitting.

Holes must be drilled for the 16 quarter-inch bolts which hold the bench together. Three of the cross braces (the longer ones, see diagram) are nailed to the under side of the top planks, which are spaced about 1/16th inch apart to allow for possible swelling. The other five cross braces are nailed to the legs: three of them 6 inches from the bottom, as shown; and two at the top, inside, on the end sets of legs. These must not be nailed on until the horizontal bolts holding the legs to the outer end cross braces are in place. The heads of all bolts should be countersunk. Bolts are also used to attach the top to the legs.

The diagonal back braces are fastened with galvanized nails—where nails are specified, this type should be used throughout—they hold better than any other kind.

Tighten the nuts on the bolts well during the initial assembly, then after a month or so go over them with a wrench and retighten. A double or triple electric outlet may be attached to one of the outer lower cross braces.—*Roland Cueva*


LEGEND
A- TOP PLANKS 2"x 6" x 7' NO. FIR OR PINE FIVE REQUIRED
B- LEGS, 4"x 4"x 30", FIR OR PINE SIX REQUIRED
C- BACK BRACES, 1"x 6", ANY STOCK MEASURE FOR LENGTH TWO REQ.
D- CROSS BRACES, 1"x 4"x 28 1/2", ANY STOCK THREE REQUIRED
1"x 4"x 26", ANY STOCK FIVE REQ.
E- CARRIAGE BOLTS, 1/4"x 6", SIXTEEN REQUIRED
GALVANIZED NAILS AS NEEDED
NOTE: LUMBER SIZES GIVEN ARE ROUGH. ALL SLOTTED CUTS AND HOLES ARE FOR STANDARD LUMBER SIZES AS LISTED. SMALLER SIZE STOCK WILL NOT AFFECT DIMENSIONS GIVEN FOR WORKBENCH
GAPS APPROX 1/16"
NAILS
TOP
BOLT HOLES
28"
28 1/2"
7' 10"
DRAWERS UNDERNEATH IF DESIRED
BACK BRACES
30"
DOUBLE ELEC OUTLET
NAILED
41"
41"
6"
SIDE VIEW
DETAIL OF TYPICAL LEG AND TOP ASSEMBLY
CROSS BRACES
LEG
TOP PLANKS

acclaimed movie short, "Fighting Wild Stallions." The Universal people set up some cameras in a box canyon and we turned Desert Dust in there with a big wild stallion. Desert Dust whipped him while the cameras recorded one of the most exciting fights in movie history.

We broke Desert Dust to halter, but no one ever rode him. A few men tried, but they didn't last long. After that, it seemed an affront.

Lots of people tried to buy Desert Dust. One man offered me $5,000, but I wouldn't have sold him for any amount. Desert Dust was killed by some jealous admirer last summer. Whoever it was put two bullets into him. Either one would have been fatal, but this fiend slashed him four times with a knife.

One day we corralled a big buckskin stallion by plane. When we approached, he took one look, jumped over a 10-foot fence from a flat-footed start, and got away. Years later, right after the record winter of '49, I saw him again. He was pitifully thin. His mares drove easily, but he was reluctant. He remembered the corral. Finally he decided to stay with his mares and trotted into the trap with them. He went straight to the spot where he had jumped out, but now he was too old to make the leap.

Near as I could tell, the buckskin must have been 35 years old. I opened the corral gate, wished him well and let him go.

The wildest horse I ever ran into was a black stallion with white feet. No one ever rode him, although many tried.

One year when officials of the Casper rodeo asked for a real bad horse I took him along. I wanted to put his halter on but the officials assured me their chute crew would do the job. He took the halter away from those fellows, bit it, stamped on it and began to chew kindling-sized splinters out of the chute.

Of course not all wild horses are so fierce. I sold a black horse to a fellow who was going to train him for trick work. He'd have made a good trick horse except that after a few days he ran away. The following year I caught the same horse. Somehow he had traveled more than 400 miles back to the Red desert.

Many times these wild horses have displayed an amazing homing instinct. Even though they're transported at night in a truck over winding highways, they have an uncanny ability to find their way back to their native ranges.

Their stamina is equally amazing. Take a band of young stallions running together—bachelors that haven't been able to take a harem away from an aging stud. We've driven them with the Cub as much as 50 miles. They'll travel the second 25 miles faster than the first.

One of my favorite yarns is about an old white stud that did his darndest to keep his mares from getting caught. We drove them 10 or 12 miles. After we corralled the band he really went to work on the mares. He bit and kicked and punished them something terrible. I didn't have to understand horse language to know he was saying: "You stupid females. You wouldn't listen. Now look at the fix you've got us into?" •

HAMMY MURDERESS

Continued from page 39

Jesse Carson saw the outlines of a new adventure. He smelled out the leaders of the loyal opposition and informed them that he had connections with channels through which arms for the revolt could flow into the country. Carson got a green light and a pocketful of dough.

The political party in power, headed by Senor Gutierrez, the president, was not long in getting wind of the fact that the revolutionists intended making Clara a political issue. One morning the political ins stole the issue. President Gutierrez and the Chamber of Deputies came out in favor of refusing to grant the extradition of Clara.

The revolt collapsed. Jesse Carson was clinked for conspiring to smuggle arms. For Clara, that was the end of him.

Morris Lavine and a couple of deputy sheriffs arrived in town to find out what gave. Nothing gave. The more pressure the American minister applied, the firmer the Honduran line held.

The American minister could do no more than see that his government's request for Clara's extradition was carried to the Supreme Court of Honduras. That august body, delicately attuned to public opinion, set Clara free.

Clara now was frantic for publicity. Her pictures had dropped out of the Honduran papers. Lavine, the scribe, informed her that Los Angeles would now quickly forget about her.

"Would they remember me if I went back?" Clara asked Lavine.

"You bet they would," said Lavine. "You'd get a hell of a homecoming and if your appeal for a new trial is granted, you'll be on the front pages for months."

"I'm going back!" said Clara.

Clara left for New Orleans with a banana tramp—a ship, that is. Fifty persons were at the dock in New Orleans to greet the star. She was disappointed. "Things'll get better," said Lavine.

Sure enough, more than 1,000 future members of radio-studio audiences were at the railroad station to see the Tiger Lady off on the Sunset Limited.

At Yuma, Armour himself got on. He had been to a good many movies during his wife's absence. He held her first at arm's length, then crushed her to him.

Just over the California line, Asa Keyes, Los Angeles district attorney, hopped aboard. "Where," he inquired, "do you think you are going?"

"Back where I came from," said Clara. "To the county jail until my appeal is decided on."

"Oh, no you're not," said Keyes. "You're going right to San Quentin."

Clara began to scream for Harrington, the mouthpiece.

"Oh, *him*," said Keyes. "He's dead."

Harrington, it now developed, might as well have been dead when he went to work on Clara's appeal. He had been four days late in filing it. The law was inflexible on a technicality like that. Harrington's oversight had put Clara's goose in the oven, and Keyes turned up the gas.

Clara had one big scene left. At the gates of San Quentin, she and Armour embraced. "I'll love you forever," said Clara, making certain she was facing the news cameras.

"Me, too," said Armour. "I'll be waiting for you—even if it's forever."

Armour, fickle fellow, wasn't around at all when Clara was paroled in 1935, after serving 12 years. "To hell with *him*," said Clara. Then one of the most celebrated of all performers in murder history vanished into the wings. •

COLDEST JOB ON EARTH

Continued from page 9

Yet Western Canada—a brash newcomer to the dominions of oil—boasted 152 parties, and at least 63 of these were concentrated in the vast winter wastelands of northern Alberta.

The seismographic crews are young and energetic. Many of them are made up of geophysics experts recently graduated from the University of Saskatchewan. They've found that the wintertime bush has been a tougher disciplinarian than any geology professor. Last fall a seismographic crew detoured their all-track snowmobile through a "soft place" in the muskeg, and promptly found themselves buried up to the doors. A couple of buddies happened along and used pick-axes to free the captives.

The only real complaint from crewmen is over the rationing of baths—usually one a week. Rationing is necessary because most water comes from distant rivers, and is sucked up by tankers through holes cut in the ice. But during spring break-up last year, at least one crew exceeded its shower quota, though through no fault of its own. Their half-track crunched through a thawing river and crewmen had to scramble for the vehicle's roof-top escape hatch.

Shivering and understandably profane, they dragged themselves from the icy waters, only to be confronted by a crew chief who'd witnessed their early spring dip. "Hey, you guys," he laughed, "who okayed an extra bath this week?"

Animals seldom bother our seismographic crews, but when they do, the incidents are more apt to be humorous than serious. A cow moose fought a losing duel with a bulldozer this year. "Musta scented the 'bull' in my 'dozer," quipped the operator, "because she jumped my machine in a spruce tussock. Charged straight at me full speed. She hit the dozer blade and knocked herself cold."

Occasionally a wintertime crew will flush a hiberating grizzly, but bears are usually so groggy from oversleep they merely lumber off in search of a less crowded area. Not so funny from an operational standpoint are minks, foxes and rabbits who take to nibbling at the seismographic cable. Apparently some chemical salt in its cold-weather plastic coating attracts small animals. Recently a mink bit through a quarter inch cable.

Since Alberta law forbids unlicensed trappers from taking game, there's not much crews can do—legally, anyway. Some party chiefs hint that they're thinking of installing an Indian trapper as a regular crew member. Indians are allowed to take game anytime they like.

Alberta's northern bush is also a land of irony. Thousands of furs are at hand at ridiculously low prices. You can buy a prime silver fox pelt for about two dollars; beaver sells for $14. But like all good things, there's a cloud on this otherwise bright fur horizon. As one seismologist declared, "Sure they're nice furs, some of the best, but the natives here haven't learned scientific tanning."

While operations dwindle to pint-size during the summer, full crews flow back into the muskeg before winter sets in. This year they'll be moving even farther north, probably into the Northwest Territories whose distant shore is washed by the Arctic Ocean.

There's some controversy over the size of the crews in relation to the amount of work there is to be done. Reports filtering through from Alaska tell of the U. S. Army cold-weather studies.

The Army's Big Delta center recently concluded that there is a two-degree drop in efficiency for every degree below zero. When it's 40 below, a man is capable of doing only about 20 percent of his normal work. When the mercury tumbles into the minus 50s, the Army claims that a man's efficiency is near zero, and that he spends nearly all his energy just staying alive. This bothers Americans and Canadians working the northern Alberta bush. They don't consider themselves supermen—far from it. They get goose pimples and shiver just like anyone else. But they keep remembering all the days they've worked 12 hours in 30 below weather and worked pretty efficiently.

"Oh, well," a seismologist said in passing off this apparent discrepancy between Alaskan test-center GIs and civilian oil crews, "the army boys chow up on C-rations. We get T-bone steaks." •

CAN YOU WIN WITH THE HANDICAPPERS?

Continued from page 5

Street, New York, picking not only the 1-2-3 horses in each race, but making the original charts. They list *all* the horses in their expected finish position and set the probable odds on each nag.

Al and Jim, the key men at the *Morning Telegraph*, are backed by a tremendous organization. Triangle employs 130 clockers at tracks throughout the country and the sole job of each of these men is to time the horses in the morning workouts. In addition, the *Telegraph* has the biographies, blood lines, and past performances of some 30,000 horses set in type and ready to use.

When a line-up for a day's races is announced, the composing room prints up the data on every entry, then sends it to Al and Jim. From these charts they make their expert selections.

"When you go to the track, stick to form as closely as possible," Jim advised. "You'll go broke quickly if you follow any long shot man. He may hit some high-paying horses, but you won't have any money left to bet by the time he does."

The good long-shot specialists disagree with Jim Watts. Jerry de Nonno, of the *New York Post*, told us, "Personally, I generally don't like to pick the so-called favorites, except in the big purse stake races. The reason I pick long shots is because there's a lot of cheating going on in the cheap races. The horses just don't try sometimes and people lose a lot of money on these phony favorites.

"The main reason a horse doesn't win when he really could is that his trainer doesn't think the odds are right for betting. Their horse might be six-to-five and there's not much to be won on a bet."

Jerry tries to beat this situation by watching the morning workouts carefully. If a horse looks good, that's often the pony Jerry picks, regardless of record.

Occasionally, of course, a dishonest clocker in collusion with a trainer will try to hide a good time made by a long shot ready to be sprung, but it's Jerry's job to find out the truth if possible.

Other selectors, of course, use the workout method to help them make their picks. Gene Ward of the *New York Daily News*, generally considered a form picker, used the method to stab a recent long shot at Belmont. He had watched a horse called Golden Trend work out at nearby Aqueduct. He was so impressed with his time that he named him "Best Bet" of the day. Golden Trend came in at $22 for $2.

But despite their knowledge and awareness, even the very best handicappers find it almost impossible to beat the horses for any length of time. Nelson Dunstan, president of the New York Turf Writers' Association, explained, "If handicappers could make their selections every morning in the privacy of their homes, they probably could make a few dollars betting. But they can't. Thousands of people read their selections and bet them. As more and more money is bet on a handicapper's selection, the odds are forced down and any winner he picks will pay the bettor much less than it would have if an average citizen had picked it."

One thing about handicappers is for sure—they all agree that it's tough to beat the horses. But, for those who keep trying they have some advice. Here it is:

1. Miss the first two races. Rumor has it that the racing secretaries make these the hardest. (On the other hand, some people swear by the Daily Double.)

2. Keep away from the Maiden Races for two-year-olds. They are new ponies feeling their way and their past performance seldom means much.

3. Learn to read the past performance records or you can't begin to lose like a professional.

4. Mares in foal (pregnant) often exceed their normal speed.

5. Form shows best in expensive stake races. Winning odds aren't high, but a great percentage of the favorites win.

6. Don't bet in races that have too large a field. Anything can happen when a mob is racing down the track.

7. Avoid touts, generally the stupidest men at the race track.

8. Watch the workout times in the trade papers. You can often spot a good bet by a horse's speed before a race.

9. Don't bet all eight races. Itchy parimutuel fingers are the greatest cause of broke players. Look for good spot bets.

10. Always bet to win. Place and show bets don't return enough proportionately. (Then of course, there are those who swear by place and show.)

11. If the track is really wet, look at the trade paper entries for a good mudder.

12. See if a horse is out of his class. A horse that has been only fair to middling in $3,500 races will probably lose in a $7,500 contest. Conversely, a horse that has been running good in $10,000 races will probably star in $7,500 races.

13. Horses over seven years old win only 10 per cent of their starts. Avoid them.

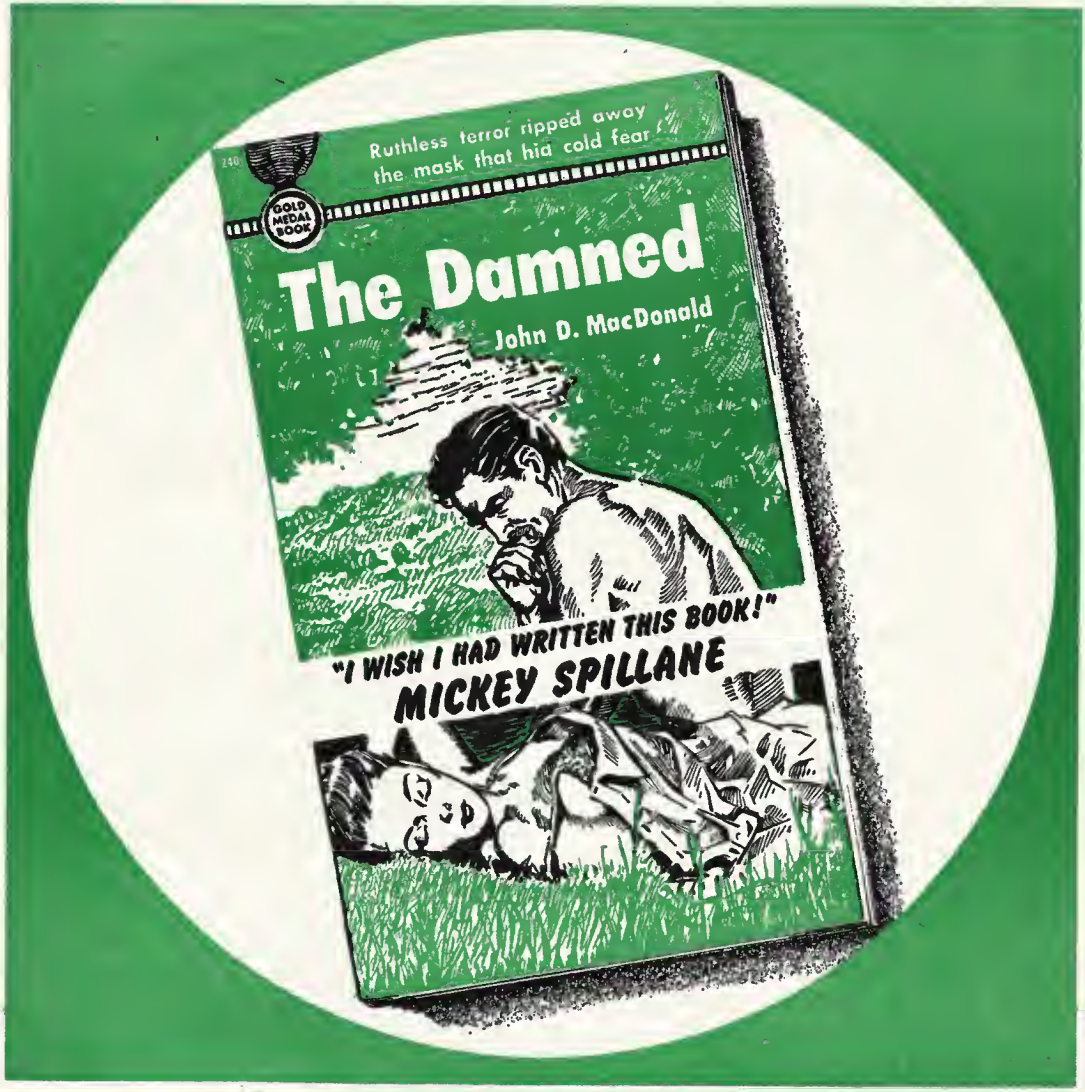
14. The substitution of a "name" jockey for someone else is usually a good sign. Still, following good jockeys down the line is a money-losing proposition.

Of course, if you're going to bet, and the labor of studying charts and morning speeds fatigues you, join the mob betting on your favorite handicapper. Who knows, he might just have clocked that long shot sleeper in the 6th! •

RECORD OF HANDICAPPERS' SAMPLE WEEK; SIX RACING DAYS AT BELMONT PARK, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.

Handicapper	Winners 48 Races	$2 To Win ($96 Investment)	$2 To Place	$2 To Show	$2 Best Bet of Day
Racing Form Consensus	14	Lost $20.90	Lost $5.30	Lost $21.70	Won $7.40
Cincinneti Record	15	Won $13.40	Won $21.90	Lost $5.80	Won $3.60
Mike Lee N. Y. Daily News and L. I. Press	13	Lost $10.70	Lost $29.60	Lost $25.90	Lost $7.80
Jerry de Nonno N. Y. Post	10	Lost $36.70	Lost $20.20	Lost $29.90	Lost $.10
United Press	7	Won $.10	Lost $38.30	Lost $32.60	Lost $5.30
Hermis Morning Telegraph	17	Won $13.60	Won $21.50	Lost $3.80	Won $6.60
Sweep Morning Telegraph	14	Lost $14.70	Won $10.20	Lost $12.80	Won $2.70
Keets N. Y. Daily Mirror	13	Lost $16.10	Lost $15.30	Lost $8.20	Lost $8.30
Associated Press	11	Lost $32.20	Lost $31.30	Lost $36.60	Lost $7.30
Ortell N. Y. World-Telegrem and Sun	15	Lost $7.50	Lost $24.60	Lost $31.30	Lost $7.10
TRACK FAVORITES	17	Lost $1.30	Won $3.50	Lost $9.60	------

BEST-SELLING NOVEL IN THIS ISSUE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GOLD MEDAL BOOK
Ruthless terror ripped away the mask that hid cold fear
The Damned
John D. MacDonald
"I WISH I HAD WRITTEN THIS BOOK!"
MICKEY SPILLANE

The Damned

by John D. MacDonald

CHAPTER ONE

The ice-blue Cadillac with Texas plates boomed across the wasteland. Darby Garon held it at ninety, brown hands lightly on the wheel.

Enchiladas and beer in Victoria had been a mistake at midday. The meal was a sodden, unmoving weight in his stomach. Both side vents were turned to slam the superheated air in against him and the girl who sat beside him, her eyes closed. The girl had been the same sort of mistake as the meal; the difference existed only in degree. She too was highly spiced, completely indigestible.

Two hundred miles from Victoria to Matamoros. Then across the bridge into Brownsville, and then a straight hard run up to San Antone, where he could get rid of her. Three weeks that had been a crazy, expensive mistake. He couldn't wait to see the last of her. Betty Mooney was something he wanted to forget quickly, and knew he never would. He knew that in some way he had soiled and shamed himself.

Abridged from the Gold Medal Novel THE DAMNED. Copyright 1952 by John D. MacDonald.

Ahead the road disappeared into a dark pool of heat waves. He felt the sweat track down the backs of his naked calves. Hell would be a place where you drove forever under an unmoving sun, riding next to a big girl in a yellow dress, a girl with her eyes shut.

Darby glanced over at her. The skirt of the yellow dress was bunched high, and her heavy thighs were slackly spread. Having eaten, the animal slept.

He scowled ahead once more at the onrushing road. A crazy, pointless thing to do. But done, now. Unforgettably done. At forty-four a man should have more sense. A successful man, with two kids in college, with a trim-bodied charming wife, with a good position with an oil company, with a fine home in Houston. Now the entire structure was rocked. Maybe it had already collapsed. Job and home and wife and kids.

Perhaps this sort of thing had been building for years. That aimless restlessness. The sudden, anticipatory shiver in his guts when he had looked at the young girls in their light dresses.

Having that damnable credit card had made it so much easier. Too easy. He had driven over to San Antonio to straighten out a mix-up on land leases. Routine trip. One of scores that he had made. Fixed it in two days, and then, in the bluing dusk of a long July day, had felt that familiar reluctance to head back toward Houston, toward routine, toward the well-ordered life where a change of breakfast eggs was a major incident.

And he had walked in the dusk streets, and, with the half-apologetic air of a tongue-lolling dog, had followed a tall, ripe-bodied young girl who strolled slowly. Caught up with her at a crossing. Took off his hat to wipe his forehead with his handkerchief, saying, "Warm, isn't it?"

He would never forget her slow bold stare of appraisal, the faint slant of light across her heavy features, as he stood there pleading dumbly for adventure, half frightened at his own temerity, wondering how and where he had lost that casual confidence of his youth that, in years gone by, had made such an approach ridiculously easy. She gave him a long time to wonder what she thought of his long, hard-boned face, the eyes set deep, the jaw elongated, the mouth hinting grimly of New England.

"Hot, I'd call it." Her voice had an odd quality, and it made Darby think of the way his youngest son had sounded during those months just before his voice changed.

"An evening for tall cold drinks in air-conditioned surroundings," he said, feeling the shame of anyone who begs.

"I was going to a movie."

"Alone?"

"Look, I'm no pickup, mister."

"Anyone can see that. I'm a stranger in town. I just thought. . . ."

"You mean you were dreaming."

"I'm sorry, miss."

"Well, you've apologized. If you had a car, a ride would be O.K. Just to cool off."

"My car is in a lot three blocks back."

And she walked back with him. She said she was Betty Mooney and she worked in a telephone office. He said he was Darby Garon and worked for an oil company. She walked tall beside him. Her hair was long, heavy, blonde-red. Her features had a funny harshness, a hawkishness. As she walked beside him, he gave sidelong glances at her high, heavy, wide-spaced breasts, at the rolling pelvic tilt of her walk. Her scent was thick in the unstirring air, and she made him feel weak, almost sick, with desire for her.

Her manner changed subtly, became less casual, more holiday-like when he unlocked the door of the long blue car for her. She saw his suitcase on the back seat.

"Going someplace, Darby?"

"Well, I'd checked out and half planned to start back to Houston." His unmeaning laugh was nervous, almost a giggle.

He drove southeast down 181, the Corpus Christi highway. She sat close to him.

"How old are you, Betty?"

"Twenty-three. You're about thirty-five, aren't you?"

"About."

Old goat, he thought, rolling in the scent of girl flesh. His hands were wet. Moira was the woman who should be riding beside him. Moira never sat that close. Moira's perfume always made him think of the crisp astringency of peppermint. The scent Betty Mooney wore so liberally made him think, crazily, of a rumpled bed.

She hummed a tune, sang the final words. "Let's get away from it all."

"I wouldn't have thought you'd know that one."

"Is it old or something? Coop plays it a lot. He's my favorite disc jock. You listen to him, don't you?"

"No. But I like the sentiment behind that song. Let's get away from it all. What do you think, Betty? Should we get away from it all?"

"Like where?"

"Oh, Mexico City. We'll take a vacation. Like the sound of that?"

"It sounds swell. But I couldn't. You know that."

"And I couldn't take you there. I was just playing a game."

"You might have got yourself in a sling if I'd said yes, then."

"If you'd said yes, I might have gone through with it." And he knew surprisingly, that he meant it. Job and family had shrunk. They were sets in a miniature theatre, seen from far away. Reality was Betty Mooney. The rest of it was a clever illusion.

"Down the road on the left there's a place. See it? Sandy's. The liquor isn't legal, but it won't poison you and it's air-conditioned."

They went in. Glass and chrome and soft lights. They knew Betty. The drinks came in coffee cups. He saw her clearly across the booth table, saw her for the first time. He knew from her face and her body that she would not last. At twenty-three she was precariously overripe. In another year or two the firm body would spread and soften, the heavy features begin to sag. At the moment the physical impact of her was as real as a fist blow against his mouth. His hands trembled.

He saw the drinks working on her, and felt them working on him.

"How about that fling?" she said.

"You mean it?"

"If it isn't a budget trip. If it lasts a little while. I don't like my job. And there are lots of jobs nowadays. I've been thinking of a job in a plant. Aircraft. They make real money."

He remembered the credit card. "It won't be a budget trip."

"How about your job?"

"I come and go as I please," he lied.

"Big shot."

"Not really. Just almost. And my wife has long since given up wondering or caring where I am." Forgive me, Moira.

"I know some kids who went down. It's no job getting the permit. I get a card and walk across the bridge. You get one for yourself and the car and drive across and pick me up."

He saw the hard flicker of excitement under her casual air. Tomorrow you can be dead. Hillary popped off last year. Heart. And only forty-six.

There was a moment in San Antonio when he sat in the car on a back street and waited for her to come down with her suitcase. He started the motor, ready to drive away, ready to drive headlong back to sanity. He bit hard on his lip. He saw her coming down the walk toward the car, tall and bountiful, full of all her slow promises.

They stayed what was left of the night at an air-conditioned court near Alice, signed in as Mr. and Mrs. Roger Robinson.

The blindness started there, in her heavy arms. She laughed softly at his eagerness. With the driving, unthinking blindness, with his insatiable need for her, the days went by and the miles went by, and the Hotel del Prado in Mexico City was merely the annex to a tourist court near Alice, Texas. He used her with deadly persistency, and the times in between were merely a nothingness, a waiting. While he napped, she bought clothes in the Mexico City shops.

And then, one morning, he awoke and it was as though he had walked out of a movie, stood blinking on the sidewalk, trying to remember which way to go.

He looked at himself and he looked at her. He had tried to call it a deathless romance, a great love. And the rationalization had shattered suddenly, leaving him naked. He saw a gaunt foolish man of middle years spending his savings on a raw, big-bodied young girl with a limited IQ. The pores of her cheeks and nose were unpleasantly enlarged. In conversation she repeated herself interminably, expressing childish infatuations

The stalled river ferry held them in the scorching heat of Mexico.

A few hours of it were enough to rip away their masks, to completely scramble the lives of the cocky killer . . . the pretty little tramp . . . the aging adulterer . . . the sexy young bride . . . her immature husband, and of the others, forced to wait until time caught up with them.

with movie actors, TV stars, disc jockeys. Her love-making was an unimaginative compound of all the movies she had seen, all the confession stories she had read. He stared in wonder at the meaty mass of her hip, at the lactic, bovine breasts, startled that he should have thought this worth the risk of destroying his world. He realized sourly that he could anticipate her every word, every sigh, every movement. Merely an irritation that she did not cover herself up. The notes to Moira and to the company, notes that had seemed so clever at the moment, with their hints about some secret deal on a Mexican oil concession, now appeared, in retrospect, to be absurd, transparent.

He wanted, near him, the clean astringency that reminded him of peppermint.

And it had ended, that morning. In Mexico City. He had tried to put her on a plane. But even though she had immediately sensed his withdrawal, his distaste, she refused to fly back.

Once, during a long-gone New Hampshire summer, he had been on his uncle's farm. Ginger, a raw-boned setter pup, had killed a chicken. Darby's uncle had tied the limp chicken around Ginger's neck. Darby Garon remembered his pity for the dog, the evident misery and self-disgust in Ginger's eyes.

The cheap little romance had died on a cool sunny morning, but she was still tied to him. They had driven down out of the Sierra Madres into the baked plains. In an incredibly short time they had arrived at that smoldering bitterness which usually takes years of loveless marriage to produce.

During their long silences he thought about himself and what he had done to his life. For twenty years of marriage he had been physically faithful. Twenty years to balance against three weeks of debauchery. Moira would know. It was not fear that shook him. It was the sense of loss, of having discarded something immeasurably precious.

The road dipped suddenly and he saw the long line of cars and trucks, frighteningly close, unmoving. The girl slammed hard against the dash as he thrust his foot against the brakes. The car swerved, tires screaming, and he fought the skid. He brought the car at last to a halt not more than a foot from the rear bumper of the car ahead.

He received angry looks, heard laughter.

"You all right?" he asked Betty. His hands were shaking with reaction, knees trembling.

"Hurt my fingers," she said dully. "You didn't have to be going so damn fast, did you?"

He didn't answer. He got out and looked down the long line. At the foot of the shallow slope he could see a muddy river not more than eighty feet wide. The road was cut down through a high river bank. He could see where it curved up the opposite shore, see the cream and white buildings of a town beyond the opposite bank. It had that cemetery look of all small Mexican towns that drowse through midday heat.

He reached in and took his road map out, unfolded it.

"That's San Fernando over there. And this is the ferry across the Rio Conchos. We're still eighty-five miles or so from Matamoros. It looks like something might be wrong with the ferry."

"You don't say," she said acidly.

"I'll walk down and see if I can find out what goes on."

"You do that."

He counted the cars and trucks as he went down the slant of the road. They were empty for the most part. There were two small stores set back from the road on the right side, some dusty trees that gave meager shade. He was number twenty-two in line. And traffic was extremely light on the highway. He had seen two cars in the last hundred miles. American tourists, Mexican travelers.

The lead car was a little green MG with Louisiana plates. A young man with a bronze tan, golden hair, and a red silk shirt sat cross-legged on a leather pillow in the shade cast by the little green car.

"How long have you been here?" Darby Garon asked bluntly.

The boy looked him over. He lifted a cigarette to his lips with a dainty grace that was as illuminating as an entire case record in Kraft-Ebbing.

"Since ten-thirty this morning," he said in a girlish voice.

Darby stared at him. "That's . . . better than four hours."

"Really, it seems more like four years. The boy I'm with is just terribly discouraged, believe me. You see, Alemán visited here recently and these dolts bought a new ferry to impress the *presidente*. The thing is too huge for the river and right now the level is dropping and every time they make a trip a lot of little men pounce into the water and scoop out the goo with shovels so they can get close enough to set planks from the shore to the ferry so you can drive up."

Darby thanked him and walked slowly back to the car.

Betty was standing there. She raised her eyebrows in question.

"The lead car has been here over four hours. Trouble with the ferry."

"We have to wait?"

"It looks like it."

"I got to have a drink of something cold. See if you can find some beer in one of those stores, sweets. I'm dry as a bone."

"If I can find anything, I'll bring it over to those trees. See if you can find some shade."

He walked slowly toward the nearer of the two grimy little

stores. The stores were adobe, and smeared with the inevitable Coca-Cola and Nescafé signs that dapple Mexico like paint stippled from a vast, careless brush. Straw sombreros and serapes, *turista* women in slacks and sun tops, the ragged polite children of the Mexican poor, the rude, screaming brats of the Mexican rich and of the *americanos*. Beer and deep slow laughter of Texans. Sun and dust and an odd flavor to the atmosphere. Darby Garon could sense it clearly. A faint edge of good humor that any minor disaster creates. Plus something moving beneath and behind the good humor. Something ancient and evil. In Mexico the sunshine can have a look of death, he thought.

He moved, stiff-shouldered, through the crowd, and a faint chill seemed to brush the nape of his neck. There was tepid beer packed around a chunk of grainy ice in a lift-top chest. The beer was being sold before it could be chilled. The fat little proprietor was charging three pesos, fifty centavos a bottle. He seemed both frightened and chagrined by his own avarice and boldness.

CHAPTER TWO

When the blue Cadillac came to a smoking stop, John Carter Gerrold took his gaze for just a moment from the face of his lovely bride and glanced at the car sixty feet away. John Carter Gerrold and Linda sat on a car robe spread on the dusty grass in the shade of one of the meager trees that topped the banks of the cut that led down to the ferry.

They had honeymooned in Taxco, walked the cobblestone streets by moonlight, hand in hand, slept in each other's arms.

There was magic about her. Magic that took his breath. The moment he had first seen her, he had known that he would either marry her or be haunted by loveliness unattainable the rest of his life.

Now he looked at her and she seemed a stranger, withdrawn and enchanted, and it was incredible to him that in the long quiet nights she had been in his arms. Always, in retrospect, the memory of sweet orgy brought back to him a curiously objective image of his own greedy use of her, and he felt oddly shamed, as though there was an indecency about it all, and improperness. It brought to his mind a childhood memory of a day when, hidden in the bushes, he had seen a swart visitor to his uncle's estate laugh coarsely and strike a kitchen match across the pure, perfect white marble belly of the garden statue of the goddess Diana. After they had gone, John had got a coarse brush and soap from the cook and had scrubbed away the yellow streak the match had left. It had made a queer stirring within him to touch the statue. And later, on a summer night when he had been visiting his uncle, he crept down to the garden. She had been white and alive in the moonlight, the weathered coldness of breast smooth against his cheek, his hands atremble against the marble. And then he cried with his teeth against the grass, wishing the statue would fall and smash him utterly.

He looked at his warm goddess beside him now, saw the utter smoothness of white hair falling thick and sleek—not precisely white, but with a faint glistening creaminess. Her brows were black and her face was oval, the brandied eyes spaced gravely, the lips wide and warm with instinctive wisdom, the throat and shoulders golden and fragile above the strapless nubby material of the pale tan linen dress. She half lay on her side, braced on her elbow, both knees drawn up, the skirt fanned over them.

John Carter Gerrold did not like her in that position. It made more pronounced the mound of her hip, and the front of the dress fell away just enough so that he, sitting with arms locked around his knees, could see the upper hemispheres of the smallish breasts that he knew to be firm, yet not so firm as cool marble, remembered.

Her position seemed to make her flesbier, more womanly. He thought of her often as standing, virginal, in billowing whiteness, her face lifted to a shaft of light that came down from an operatic sky.

Had he never touched her then, she would have remained as in the beginning: remote, and with that slow and lovely enchantment that made all persons soften their voices when they spoke to her.

He glanced at the thermos. "More water, darling?"

"It's over an hour since they took that last car across. I think we better ration it."

"Of course. Miserable place, isn't it?"

She turned her head slowly to look up and down the road. "I like it. I don't know why. I was beginning to think we were . . . going back too fast. This is a little time to think. And maybe we can talk, John."

He gave her a startled look. She traced the car-robe pattern with her finger. Her hair swung forward, partly masking her face. "Talk! We've talked about everything under the sun."

"All the little things. None of the big things."

"I worship you, Linda. Is that a little thing?"

She tossed her head with a motion that swung the glossy hair back. "I wonder if maybe I just want to be loved. Not worshiped. You . . . you sort of put me in a frame, darling. Or on a pedestal or something."

"Where you belong."

She frowned. "Do I? You know, all this talk about adjustments, about having to make them when you marry—I can feel myself turning into what you keep insisting that I am. Sort of stately or something. Like I might break. I'm made of meat and bone and muscle, like anybody else. Suppose sometimes I want to whoop or holler? Damnit, I don't want to go through life being too ladylike."

He grinned teasingly. "But you're a lady, aren't you?"

"You honestly don't seem to get what I mean. Look, I can put it another way. Even before your mother flew down last week to drive back with us, something funny was happening to our love-making, my darling. Something I don't think I care for. My God, is it going to degenerate eventually into a formal little ritual run on a time schedule with both of us not daring ever to change, as if it was a—a sacrament or something?"

Her words sounded coarse and made him squirm inwardly. "I was under the impression that everything had been satisfactory," he said stiffly.

"Don't get all hurt, now. In the beginning it was wonderful. And I trusted you and I began to get . . . a lot bolder, if you'll remember."

He remembered and flushed.

"There could have been more and more, my darling. With you I'm a wanton, because I love you, and love can't be pigeonholed into right and wrong. And love can't be fooled, you know. You didn't say anything. But in your body I could feel . . . oh, a sort of withdrawal, and a coolness, and . . . shock, I guess. I wanted us to go on and find a thousand ways to love each other, all of them perfect. But somehow you managed to make me shy again, just when I was getting over being shy, and we're getting into a rut, and that isn't what I expected or wanted marriage to be."

"I don't like that kind of talk, Linda."

"Makes you squirm or something, doesn't it? Sex talk in the bright sunlight. Remember those first days in Taxco? You took me in the afternoon. Now the night has become the time for making love. As if it were something shameful to be hidden away in the dark. Don't you like the look of my body by daylight? Are you ashamed of your own? You shouldn't be. One afternoon the sun shone across our bed. Remember?"

She moved close to him and touched his wrist. "Darling, it's been worse since your mother came down. All sort of aseptic and nasty."

"I had no idea you felt—"

"Now hush and don't accuse me of anything. I just think, darling, that somewhere inside of you is a little lid that's screwed down tightly on top of some very real honest lusty warmth. For the first days of our honeymoon we managed to loosen that lid a bit and it was very good, for both of us. Then you noticed that too much of you was escaping, so you fastened the lid back down again. And, my darling, I feel left out. I want us to find some way to . . . release you. Sex isn't a nasty word. Neither is breast or buttock or nostril or left wrist. I think somebody gave you the wrong slant when you were a little boy. I certainly don't want to have to learn to think of the sexual act as a rather quick and unpleasant little wifely duty to be endured in stoic silence. I want to be a wife, and a damn good mistress too."

"Please, Linda!"

"Well, I do!"

"And there's such a thing as good taste, you might remember."

"Don't try to feed me that pallid kind of philosophy, my boy. Just take my word that you're wrong, and that you can do something about it. I'm nineteen and you're twenty-two, but this

is something you can't patronize me about, because I think my instincts are right, John Carter Gerrold."

"Probably all women want the honeymoon to last forever. I hear it's a sign of the immaturity of American women."

"Nuts! You know what kind of relationship I want with my man? Read a book by Hemingway. 'To Have and Have Not.'"

"He writes filth."

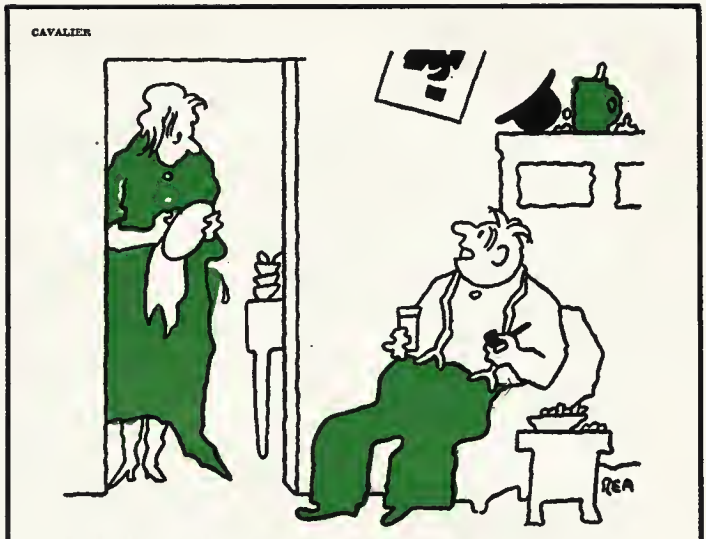
"Filth is in the mind of the bebolder, darling."

"All his people are Neanderthal."

She looked at him angrily. "You bring up a point. Maybe I have a hunch that if you aren't a whole and uninhibited man in this part of marriage, you might not be much of a man in anything else. And maybe you'd be better off trying to do something besides work for your Uncle Dod for twelve thousand a year when we get back."

"Linda," he said brokenly, "I . . . I hate those things you're saying, but I can't stand quarreling with you. Now or ever."

She knelt and kissed him quickly, lightly on the lips. "Poor old Johnny. You just married a wench, that's all. I look virginal as all hell. That's how come I held my modeling job and how come your family finally relented. But believe me, honey, I'm going to straighten you out in this particular department. I want you to promise to try to help me." She moved a bit closer, giving bim a gamin grin. "You know, it has helped my shyness a little just to talk it out, Buster."



"What do you mean, you don't feel good? You're on your feet, ain't you?"

It made him want her, badly, and at the same time it made him want to move away from the warm insistency of the touch. This was something that she would probably get over, in time. Everybody had a right to be a little crazy on her boneymoon. That didn't mean you had to keep it up forever. He glanced guiltily around to see if anyone were watching them. She sank back to her original position. He wished she would sit up straight. It made her look so damnably hippy to lie like that, even though she was so slim as to look almost fragile. That was another thing that had startled him. He had taken her the first time with almost a fear that he would hurt ber, crush her. But her slimness had a muscled vibrancy that had almost shocked him.

She would get over it after a bit and take a proper wifely attitude. She seemed to enjoy it too much, and that didn't seem right, somehow.

He wished she would hate it. And then he could feel that almost pleasant guilt afterward, and apologize to her abjectly, and beg her forgiveness for dirtying her.

He glanced down toward their black Buick sedan. "I can't understand why Mother insists on staying in the car. It must be like a furnace."

"She'd rather be in a furnace than take a risk of picking up some Mexican microbe, darling."

"I don't see where you have any right to criticize ber, Linda."

"Oh, I know. She's been a swell buddy to you. And she's so terribly conscious of striking exactly the right attitude toward me. John's cute little wife. 'She did some modeling, you know, just as a hobby, for one of the best agencies in New York.' That killed me the first time I heard it. I could lose five pounds during a tough day under those ligbts, and fall into bed so bushed I couldn't even take time to brush my teeth. The money I made got my brother through his last year of law school. Great hobby."

"I know it does sound a little snobbish, Linda, but you've got to realize that she was raised in the Rochester atmosphere. And she's a very strong and determined woman. It wasn't easy on her when my father left us and ran off with that tramp who worked in his office, either."

She tilted her head and looked at him. "Your father fell prey to the dreadful magic of illicit love?"

"That's right."

"You know, that's a clue I never thought of before. How old were you?"

"I was seven at the time, and I worshiped my father. I don't know what you mean about a clue. It was a terrible shock to me when he went away. I couldn't understand it. I could just get the vague idea that he had done some nasty thing with a woman, but I didn't know what it was. He wrote pleading letters for years, but Mother refused to divorce bim."

"The poor woman."

"Yes, it was hard on her."

"I didn't mean that woman. I mean the one be ran off with."

"If that's your idea of a joke, Linda. . ."

"You better go see bow Mother Ann is before I say something I sbouldn't."

He walked away from her, holding his back rigid. The stupid ferry seemed to be lodged permanently on the far bank. He looked into the Buick. All the windows were down and the elder Mrs. Gerrold sat in the back seat. She was leaning against the pile of suitcases, sound asleep. Her dress looked damp and her face was shiny with perspiration. Only the crisp gray ringlets of her hair looked undaunted.

John smiled and walked back to his bride. Certainly if Mother had realized how much she would detest Mexico, she would never have flown down to ride back with them.

"She's asleep," he said.

She yawned. "Let's take the blanket and tbe thermos and walk down by the river. Maybe we can find a spot of cooler shade."

She took the thermos and walked ahead of him. The dress was one he had bought her in Mexico City. It was a good dress, beautifully fitted across the hips, around the waist. She walked with the gliding grace of the trained model, her head high, toeing in slightly, hips moving tautly compact under tbe nubby fabric. In childhood imaginings Diana had walked from the garden pedestal, and had walked exactly that way. Tbey kept to the high bank and he caugbt her arm to help her where it dipped steeply down toward the murky water.

"Want to go wading?" she asked.

"Not in that stuff, certainly. There doesn't seem to be any place down here. Shall we go back?"

"Let's try along the bank. Come on."

He shrugged and followed her. The sun began to bite throughb his thin shirt into bis shoulders. Sweat stung the corners of his eyes.

On and on. "Hey, is this a cross-country bike?"

"Just to there, John. Just to that clump of trees."

"That's another half mile!"

"But it looks so pleasant."

When they got to the trees, he saw that it was pleasant. These

trees were taller, thicker. And the grass was green under them, not seared and dusty as back by the bighway. They sat on the spread blanket and drank sparingly of the water. He looked up across a bend of the river. The toy ferry twinkled in distant beat. Cars waiting on the far bank sent blue-white dots of chromium fire across the distance.

"Cooler bere, isn't it?" she said.

"Mmmm. Much. You're a bright girl."

She lay back on the blanket and said, "Kith me quick. I'm thickthteen."

He bent over her and kissed her, lightly. Her arm went around bis neck and pulled his lips back again as he started to sit up. Her mouth enlarged and was moist. He liked the light dry kisses. These kisses were the ones that brougbt on the need of her, brougbt on the spinning craziness. She moaned and thrust against him.

"Now," she said, deep in her throat. "Now, John Carter Gerrold. Here and now, in sunlight again."

"Your dress," be said haltingly. "It will be rumpled."

She sat up, frankly crying, hitched the skirt of the dress from under her hips, pulled the dress off over her head, and lay back again, dressed in the blue honeymoon wisps of fragilest nylon and lace.

He took her then. And while it was happening, he knew that this was right and true and forever, that there was no nastiness, that Diana had been stone.

And they lay side by side, her head tucked against his shoulder.

The uncomfortableness was seeping back, the feeling of having done something animal, reprebensible. The body that had been incredibly lovely only moments before was becoming overpoweringly of the flesh, sticky-soft, enervating.

He said quickly, thickly, "Now is when . . . it happens. I go sour inside. As if it had been wrong. I don't know. Maybe you're right about that lid. Something twisted wrong inside me."

"How much money do we have left?" she asked, surprising him.

"Hub? Oh, maybe four thousand. A little more."

"Darling, Uncle Dod can get along without you for a little time. We'll drive your mother home, and then we're going out to Santa Fe and call on your father and his lady."

He sat up. "Mother would *never* permit that."

"Don't you see? This strange sort of reserve of yours comes from what happened. If it had hit you harder, Jobn, I think you might have turned into a queer, a fairy."

"What a grotesque—"

"Let me finish. The idea was deeply implanted in you that women are something nasty. Loving a woman is faintly unpleasant to you. You love me. So far it has been strong enougb, that love, to take good care of us. But unless we go and dig out the causes, we'll never have a good life. Please, Jobn."

"I have nothing to say to him or to that woman. After what they did—"

"Nothing to say to them, but maybe something to learn from them. If their love, legalized or not, has been strong enough to last for fifteen years, I wouldn't be surprised if we found something very special, very refreshing. And I've noticed one thing. You keep saying your father 'ran off' with that woman. According to what I've heard about it, he left with her quite openly after trying for two years to get your mother to agree to a divorce."

"Get your clothes on," he said harshly.

"Cover up the nasty woman. Get her under wraps. I bet you'd put me in a Mother Hubbard if you thought you could get away witb it."

"Shut up!"

"You see, the angrier you get, the better my guess seems to be. And here is your ultimatum, John Carter Gerrold! Either we go out there, or I leave you."

"You don't mean that!"

"I mean it with all my heart."

"That's the only thing that would get me out there. The thought of losing you."

"Tben humor me."

He forced a smile. "It looks as though I'll have to. Sball we get back?"

"Soon as you zip me up in back, my friend."

He zipped her up, kissed the nape of her neck. They started back toward the distant highway, hand in hand.

CHAPTER THREE

Del Bennicke upended the tepid beer and let it fill his throat. He lowered the bottle and stared across at the young girl and boy walking along the high bank, headed for the river with blanket and thermos bottle.

A nice little bit. He liked the shape and size of her. A trim little figure and pointy little breasts and a neat way of walking. The kid with her was a pup. All hands and feet, gangly with heavy dark-rimmed glasses and a sort of girlish look around the mouth. Husky enough, though. Somehow he didn't look as though he'd be able to take the right kind of care of that little *atsui kenju.*

Suddenly, in spite of the heat, Bennicke shivered. Ye gods, what kind of man could start smacking his chops over a platinum blonde wben all the time he was carrying around in the back of his mind the picture of that room in the gook's house in Cuernavaca?

Boy, you really put it in a sling that time. These Latins can get impetuous, so the man says. He had been in jams before, plenty of them. But never a daisy like this. A man in his home town could hardly yak bis way out of this one—and in a foreign country he'd have no chance at all.

He'd taken the only way out. Left them lying there and got in the car and headed for the border, the shortest, fastest way.

Bennicke was a short, compact man with thick shoulders, a wise and worldly tough-nut face, brisk tilted eyes, and a black brush cut, wiry as horsehair. Wars and rumors of wars in the earth's far corners had nurtured him. He had the strut of the soldier of fortune, but too fond a regard for his own skin to wish to hear any sbots fired in anger. A brisk line of patter and more brass than a dozen temple gongs had enabled him to worm his way into the homes of the weirder variants of the international set, and be adopted as mascot, drinking partner, or bed companion, depending on the circumstances.

He was a professional guest, and between times he had smuggled gold, worked on oil crews in Venezuela, pimped in Japan. Fists and tongue and knife had got him out of nearly every variety of trouble. He had an ungrammatical flair for languages, came from New Jersey, and thought of all other races as gooks.

And this time trouble had closed in on him, but firmly. Leaving the two bodies behind him, he had boomed up over the mountains through Tres Cumbres and down onto the plain of Mexico City, and the night wind at ten thousand feet had sobered him for the first time in three days. That's where the party had started, in Mexico City. He'd started drinking alone, and by the third drink had picked up an *americano,* a correspondent for one of the news magazines. The *americano* knew of a big party going on among the embassy crowd. They decided to grace tbe party with their presence. The more tireless members of the party broke off and established a new party in a Chapultepec apartment. One of the drunker citizens was a good bullfigbter named Miguel Larra, and he had with him a young item named Amparo, wbo had just enough *indio* blood in her to make Del Bennicke taper off on the drinking and start a series of oblique maneuvers intended to cut her loose from her bullfighter.

So when the party moved to the bullfighter's Cuernavaca house, Del Bennicke went right along, all of them singing in the big car that swayed and roared across the mountains, with the girl conscious of what Bennicke was up to, and, warm beside bim in the car, doing just enough teasing to keep his teeth on edge. It was a big party and it dwindled fast in the big walled bouse just north of Cuernavaca as people paired off and/or passed out. After Larra passed out, Del got to the little girl with neither more nor less difficulty than he had anticipated. And now he knew that be should have taken off right then and there, hopping a *turismo* back to the city. But it had been so good he was thinking in terms of just one more time. *"Solamente una vez mas, por favor."* But the bullfighter had bounced back from what should have been a clobbering hangover, and dragged Del with him down to Lake Tequesquitango and initiated him into the art of fishing with goggles and harpoon gun for large-mouth bass. They picked up half a dozen bass and drank a large bottle of tequila in the process and drove back, tight, to Cuernavaca, and somehow tbe chance didn't materialize. On the next day, the rest of the party having faded gently away, the three of them drove far on dusty roads to look at some bulls and drink acid pulque, and they got back at dusk, and Del, bushed and sodden, had hit the sack right away, only

to be awakened perhaps an hour later by the warm and scented body against his side.

And she had to have a light on, because she was one of those who has to have a light on, and when she suddenly gasped, Del turned his head and saw the bullfighter standing there, face twisted, eyes gone dead, aiming one of the guns they had used underwater. The short spear with the harpoon on the end fitted into a slotted tube, and fat rubber bands slammed it out of the tube. As the rubber bands made their vicious whacking sound, Del threw himself back, and the thing made a quick gleam in the lamplight and chomped into Amparo with a sound that was both hard and wet. It hit right under her left breast and she half turned toward the bullfighter. She made the smallest of gasps and put both hands on the shaft and pulled at it very delicately, but the barbed head had turned inside her, precisely as it was designed to do. She coughed in a most delicate and ladylike way, and shivered just a bit, and died very quietly, as though to make up by discreetness during her last moments for twenty years of bounding lustiness.

As Del came off the bed, the bullfighter hurled the gun itself and Del eeled away from it and came in fast, thinking only of putting the character out of action long enough to give him time to think. He caught the face with stone fists, and with all the precision he wanted, but with too much panic behind the blows and too much force, and the kiss-off punch lifted the bullfighter's feet from the floor and the first part of him to hit the floor had been the back of his head, and the floor, unhappily, had been tile. When Del rolled him over and fingered the back of his head, he felt the sickening looseness. Some piece of the bone must have cut into the brain in a strange way, because during the time of dying the lean bullfighters legs made the same hesitant running motions as a sleeping dog chasing rabbits up the dream hills.

So he had turned out the light and locked the door and later tossed the key into some roadside cactus. It would have been a mistake to take the big car, the one with the horns mounted on front, and the whole car all chrome and a paint the shade of raspberry ice. He had taken the small car and it was British and had no guts under the hood, so it was shifting, shifting, shifting, all the way over the hills and through the night, sober now, and figuring on getting to Matamoros and parking the car in the square and walking across the bridge before the alarm went out and things got warmer than he cared to think about. A jam supreme. Not only kill a bullfighter, which is headline stuff all over Mexico and South America, but chum up with a correspondent, no less, who can fix you precisely in the time and place where it can't be anybody but you. And a servant fingering the brim of the vast hat as he opened the gate to let the little car out, a faint concern in his eyes, wondering if the *americano* was a *ladrón* stealing the *carrito* of the master.

He stood in the sun and smashed his knuckles into his palm and ice water ran out of his armpits and down his ribs. This ferry business made you feel that the hex was really on. By now he should have been across the border. He knew what would happen if he were picked up. Del Bennicke knew the score on Mexican prisons. The American consul would look fixedly in the opposite direction. Tortillas and beans for twenty years. They wouldn't execute him. Slap him in and let him rot. And a funny angle there. The gook prisoners can do handicraft stuff and sell it and get the extra pesos that mean a change in the diet now and again. But American prisoners are forbidden to make any money in a Mexican prison.

By now the word would be out. He had to get a good plan and fast. The car was dangerous. In darkness, maybe he could switch some plates. Or maybe just take the plates off the Humber and toss them into the brush and abandon it right there. Move down and go across on the ferry as a pedestrian and try to get a ride to Matamoros with some tourists. And, at Matamoros, the hell with the bridge. The big river would be mostly mud bar. Be a wetback.

He had to leave all his stuff in Mexico City. But the sweaty money belt around his middle was hard-packed with a nice collection of the pictures of Grant. The bearded general added up to six thousand something. Just get across that border and drift west and pick out a good name and slowly get the documentation to back it up, and then stay out of any kind of jam because the prints are on file, have been on file ever since that extortion rap back in '41. This was enough to give a man religion. Maybe it was the end of roaming. Get hold of a gas station or something and pick out some sturdy wench and raise enough kids to look respectable as all hell. Might be a bang in that, having kids. Something new, to do it on purpose.

And he was back in that tiled room again, with those hands pulling so gingerly on the cruel shaft. He knuckled his eyes and held his breath. Maybe they were waiting on the other side of the river. Or maybe the *policia* were screaming up the road from Victoria.

Oh, baby, you're really in the soup this time. Right up to your pointy little ears. Son-of-a-bitch wanted to nail me with that harpoon thing. Should have aimed higher. Hit him too hard. Knuckles still sore. Maybe I ought to move down stream and swim the river and to hell with the car. Wish there was some joker here who looked enough like me. Get him off in the brush and hammer him and lace him up and switch identification.

He sat on his heels in the shade, atop the bank. On the other side he saw a big young girl in a yellow dress. A nice gutty-looking face, and red-bronze hair and a pair of them to make your eyes bulge. He had vaguely noticed her when the blue Cad had joined the interminable line. With a guy old enough to be her daddy. Not married, that pair. Giving each other the stone face, too. He saw her tilt her bottle up, saw her throat work. She lowered the bottle and looked across at him, forty feet away. She set the bottle down, and fluffed at her back hair, and arched her back a little, just enough to push those things out farther than God intended. There wouldn't be any of that in prison. Not a morsel of it. They'd let you dream about it, and that was all.

What the hell cooks with that ferry? He jumped up impatiently and walked down the shoulder of the road, setting his feet down hard.

As he passed a black Buick sedan, he heard a funny sound. He went on for a few steps and stopped and listened. He heard the sound again. He followed it back to the Buick and looked in. The Buick was the car the platinum piece had come in. He stared at the old dollie in the back seat. Her face was gray and her eyes were open a little and all he could see was whites. Her hands were flexing spasmodically and cords in her throat stood out. The noise he had heard was a startlingly loud grinding of her teeth. Blood stood bright in the corner of her mouth.

That old doll was really sick. Maybe dying. Bennicke wheeled and trotted through the heat, trotted down to the bank. People looked curiously at a man who would run on such a day.

Del went over to the two queers who sat in the shade of the MG. One was blond and one was dark, and both of them were pretty. "You boys notice where the girl with the real blond hair went? Her and her boy friend?"

They stared at him with their shining eyes. The dark one giggled. He said, "They were carrying a blanket and they went thataway, pardner." He pointed downstream.

"Thank you sweety," Del lisped.

"I suppose you think you're really smart," the blond one in the red silk shirt said.

Bennicke moved down the river bank, keeping to the high ground, looking ahead of him. At last he saw the pair of them coming. He went directly toward them. When he was close enough, he could see that flushed tangled look about the girl, the look of love.

"Say," he said, as they looked at him oddly, "you go with the black Buick with the New York plates, don't you?" The boy nodded. "The old lady in the car is sick or something. Maybe you better hustle and take a look at her."

Without a word the boy brushed by him and began to run, long-legged, fleet.

The girl said, "Thank you very much." She hurried away after the boy and Del trotted along behind her. Certainly a cute little figure.

By the time they got to the car a group had gathered. The boy looked completely helpless, completely stricken.

"Linda, she's . . . she's awful sick. I don't know what. . . ."

Del tilted up his chin and in a brass voice he brayed, "Is anybody around here a doctor? *Hay un médico aquí?*" He tried again. The gathered laymen shifted uncomfortably, in guilt at not being doctors. The girl in the yellow dress came down off the bank. She addressed herself to Del. "No doctor, hey. I

don't know what I can do, but I was in training to be a nurse before it got too rugged for me."

"Take a look. What do you think?"

The girl had a ripe heavy scent. She pushed by Del and looked into the car.

"God!" she said softly, reverently. She backed out, looking pale. "I thought maybe it was heat exhaustion or something. I don't know what that is. Sort of like a convulsion or something. Don't think it's a heart attack. Only thing I can say is to get her out of that oven in there. If we could fix up a stretcher, like. Then take her into one of those stores. She better have a doctor quick."

Del turned and found a boy of about thirteen, a boy whom he had seen in the store where they still had some beer.

In his ungrammatical rapid Spanish he asked the boy if there was a doctor in San Fernando. The boy said there was a very marvelous doctor there who could speak excellently English.

"Can you swim across the river?"

"It is possible."

Del took out a twenty-peso note, tore it in half, gave the boy half. "When you bring the doctor back in one of those small boats on the far shore I will give you this other piece of the money. If it is very, very rapid, this thing, I will give you even more."

The boy raced off down the road. The boy with the glasses had come out of his trance of helplessness. He had taken two suit coats out of his luggage and he turned to Del, saying, "If we had some sticks to put through the sleeves. . . ."

A nearby Mexican got the idea and raced off toward a truck. He came back with two lengths of heavy bamboo. Del and the boy improvised a stretcher, and it was Del who got into the car, lifted her awkwardly, handed her out toward the boy's arms.

Del took one end of the stretcher and the boy took the other. They carried her up to the store. The crowd parted. A counter had been cleared. They hoisted her onto the long counter.

The girl in the yellow dress said, "Maybe some real cold cloths on her head would help. She isn't having those convulsion things, but if we could get a stick or something between her teeth, it might save her tongue a little when the next one comes along."

A short piece of dirty stick was produced. The girl in the yellow dress washed it carefully, and when Del held the woman's jaw open, she got the stick in. The teeth shut hard on the stick, and it gave her a ridiculous look. An aged dog with an arid bone.

The girl called Linda said, "John, darling, he'll be here soon." She went to him, laid her hand on his arm.

Del Bennicke was not a man easily shocked. But what happened then made him feel almost ill. The boy wheeled on the girl and slapped her across the mouth with a full-arm swing, driving her back so that she would have fallen if the end of another counter had not caught her across the small of her back. Her lips were broken and her eyes were wide and dazed.

In shrill hysteria the boy shouted, "You were making me do that while Mamma was here dying! You took me away for that while Mamma was here all alone."

The girl got her balance and pushed herself away from the counter. She gave him a long look, an oddly sober, unangered look. And then, with her straight back, with her model's walk, she left the store.

The boy called John gradually became aware that everyone was staring at him. There was contempt in all the glances, Del knew. He saw the sick look in the boy's eyes. He put his face in his hands. He turned and moved closer to his mother.

"It's going to be O.K., Mamma," he said softly. "It's going to be fine, Mamma."

Del left the store, searched for the tan linen dress and white hair, saw her walking slowly toward the shade. He caught up with her. Her lips had begun to puff. She looked at him with eyes that had gone quite dead.

Del said, "A guy can lose his head when it's his old lady."

"Thanks for the try, my friend."

"Your husband, isn't he?"

"Let's say wasn't he."

"Don't be too rough on the kid. Some guys take a long time to grow up."

"I can't afford to wait for it, Mr. . . ."

"Del Ben . . . son."

"I'm Linda Gerrold. Thanks for taking charge. John was useless."

The girl in the yellow dress joined them. "Hi, folks. I'm Betty Mooney, by the way. I'm trying to remember some of that stuff I tried to learn out of the nursing books. Honey, that jerk certainly teed off on you, but don't let it get you down."

"Miss Mooney, Mrs. Gerrold. And I'm Del Benson."

Linda sighed. "I better go back and give him a chance to slap me again. Maybe I can help a little."

She turned back toward the store. Betty watched her go. "There's quite a gal, Mr. Benson."

"A little beauty, and well set up in the guts department."

"If I'd been tagged like that, that crumby little store would be upside down by now." She turned and slanted her eyes at him. They were almost of a height. "Hello, Benson," she said.

"Hi, Mooney. Where's your fella?"

She gave a suggestion of a sneer. "You mean where's old sourball? Sitting over there trying to decide whether to bite himself and die of the infection."

"Those kind go sour when they get enough."

"How about your kind?"

"For my kind there isn't enough."

"We must have gone to different schools together, Benson."

He gave her a flat-lipped grin, and his mind was ticking over, very carefully. The old lady's sickness had opened things up a little. There might be three cars to play with: the Gerrold's Buick, the Cad that this Mooney gal was traveling in, and the Humber he'd taken from the bullfighter.

"Is that a glint in your eye?"

"I was wondering how a deal like you got tangled up with that Chamber of Commerce type over there."

"It was a mistake, Benson. San Antone was hot and I was bored and I thought well, just once in my life, I might as well kick up my heels."

"Take him good?"

She ran her tongue tip along her lower lip. "I've got about twelve hundred bucks' worth of clothes stashed in that Cad, Benson."

"From me you won't get twelve bucks' worth of clothes."

"We won't call that news, will we? You're too smart to take."

"You got a place in San Antone?"

"Such as it is, and it isn't much."

"Well?"

"Benson, maybe you move a little too fast, huh?"

"Deal it this way. I spring for rent, food, and liquor. Can you cook in your place?"

Her eyes turned wise. "You wouldn't be trying to drop out of sight or anything? I mean if you've got trouble, don't try to hand me any."

"I might have a little, but nothing I can hand you. You'd be clear all the way. This is Mex trouble. Across the line I'm fine. Only I might have to get across the hard way. You know Brownsville?"

"Not too good."

"Two miles north of town on the main drag is a motel called El Rancho Grande. Maybe the old boy could drop you there. I won't have a car."

"Then maybe we walk to San Antone?"

"Maybe we do."

"I've been crazy all my life, so why change now?"

He looked toward the river. Someone was rowing a boat across. Just one person in the boat. Bennicke cursed softly when he made out that it was the boy. He walked down the road with Betty Mooney and got to the bank as the boy pulled the boat up. The boy looked worried.

He said, "Señor, the Dr. Reinares waits for a child to be brought to him. A snake has bitten the child and so he cannot leave. So he suggests that the señora be taken across in this boat and carried to him."

She stared at the filthy boat, at the fish scales, at the floor boards awash. "She can't ride in that, Benson."

Bennicke heard a shout from the far side of the river. The ferry had at last unloaded. A passenger car and a pickup truck crawled up the planks and were blocked on deck. The ferry began to move toward them.

"So maybe we get her into a car and take the head of the line," Bennicke said softly.

Betty looked at the waiting cars. "That," she said, "is going to be a good trick."

CHAPTER FOUR

Bill Danton sat on his heels, sombrero pushed back off his forehead, tiny end of cheap Mexican cigarette pinched carefully between thumb and forefinger. In threadbare khaki work pants and T shirt with a rip in the shoulder, thonged sandals on brown bare feet, he looked no different from the Mexican farm workers he was chatting with. He and his father owned and ran, as partners, a big place near Mante. Cotton and rice. Work on the place had baked him dark. When he stood up, however, there was a rawboned Texan looseness about his big frame that differentiated him from the others.

They sat near the river bank and he had taken a quiet amusement from the *turista* comments on Mexicans in general. He knew that none of them had picked him out as being as much Texan as Mexican. His pickup truck was the second vehicle in line. He had been on his way from Mante to Houston, accompanied by Pepe Hernández, his good friend, to pick up farm-equipment from the wholesaler.

When he thought of it at all, which was seldom, Bill Danton sometimes wondered that one person could be, so completely, two people. Dad was responsible for that. Bill's mother had died a year after he was born. At that time Dad had a place in the valley. Mostly citrus, and some land in vegetables. And the house had needed a woman in it, mostly to take care of the little guy. So Dad had hired a slim, timid, wide-eyed Mexican gal named Rosa. Bill guessed that, at that stage, Dad had most of the usual valley prejudice. You used wetback labor when you could get it. It was cheap labor and it made good sense to take them on and hope you could keep them. If you were a "white man" in the valley, it was O.K. to sleep with Mex gals, if your taste ran that way, but you surer than hell didn't go around marrying them.

"We'll have two Scotch and sodas. Make hers d-o-u-b-l-e."

And so it had taken Dad about two years to get over the loss of his wife, fall in love with Rosa, and marry her. Now Dad could be amused in a quiet way about the way the valley had treated him after that little social error. But he had told Bill in recent years that, at the time, he was pretty bitter about it. And he didn't want any mark left on Bill, or on Rosa's kids. So he had sold out and moved down into Mexico with Bill and the pregnant Rosa. He had bought the spread near Mante, and made application to become an *imigrante*, and after a few years the papers came through, and Dad was a Mexican citizen. It had taken quite a bit of trouble to get Bill established on a *residente* basis, with special permission to work, while still retaining his United States citizenship.

Dad had prospered in Mexico. Rosa gave birth to five children. The big house had always been full of the warmth that comes only from love. Music and much laughter and hard work. Dad had always spoken to Bill in English, and so, when Bill had been sent up to a private school in Houston, and later had gone to Texas A. and M. for the agriculture courses, he had but slight trouble with languages.

And now, at twenty-five, he was perfectly content with his life, perfectly adjusted. His eldest half-sister had recently married and they were building a house on the Danton land. Rosa, at forty-two, was slim as a girl. Dad, burly, white-haired, was head of the local association in Mante, and was looked up to throughout the area.

Bill imagined that one day he would marry. The girl would undoubtedly be Mexican. But he was in no hurry.

Bill had two personalities. As he sat on his heels in the little group, his mobility of face, the quick gestures of his hands were completely Mexican. When he spoke English it was with a lazy slow drawl, with a certain impassivity of face, with slow infrequent gestures of his big hands. He made the switch from one personality to the other without effort, without conscious thought. When he listened to the tourists complain about the reluctant ferry, he was aware that in his American frame of mind, he would be almost equally irritated. But, as a Mexican, he knew that since one obviously couldn't carry the pickup truck across the river on one's back, and since the men of the ferry were doing as well as they could, it was wise to relax, to make small jokes. It could take another hour, or another day. *Quién sabe?* The cultivator and the largest tractor would remain idle for a longer period. So? When one must wait, it is well to accept the fact.

Tree shadows were lengthening, and he squinted his eyes against a swirl of dust picked up by a breeze that had scudded across the river, ruffling the water.

Pepe came back and squatted beside him. He sighed elaborately. "One could grow a long beard while waiting."

Bill grinned. "I think Carmelita will still be in Mante by the time we get back, *amigo*."

"Ai! I concern myself with this day because I am a loyal employee, and become accused of the silliness of love." He changed the subject. "That shouting some minutes ago was because one tourist lady has been taken ill, and has been carried into the store."

"Too much sun?"

"Something else, I think. Something bad, with a grinding of the teeth. She is the mother of the young man we saw, the one with the glasses who walked with the beautiful girl with the light hair. After the mother was carried in, they spoke together and the man with the glasses struck the girl in front of everyone. It was very ugly and very curious. I did not understand it. If she is his wife, he has a privilege to beat her, but it is better done when alone, I believe. And the boy who swam, he was swimming for a doctor, and came back, you will notice, with none."

"You are a veritable newspaper, a monster of curiosity. It does not concern us, Pepe."

"One must move the hours by with more quickness. And you, I remember, Beel, applied a crude word to the young lady with pale bair. Thus, I thought you would wish to know of her problems."

"I merely called her a *pollita*."

"But with a certain licking of the lips, *verdad?*"

The others in the group laughed. Bill stared severely at Pepe. "But it was you, señor, who whistled, *verdad?*"

"Ah, look!" Pepe said. "Approaching is the evil monster of a ferry."

They all watched it, motionless. There was a concerted groan as it nuzzled against the mud when it was still thirty feet from shore. The laborers aboard stared moodily down at the water, then jumped off into mid-thigh water and began rolling it listlessly with their shovels.

Bill said, "From now on the progress will be like that of Pepe hurrying to work. One meter each half hour, I believe."

He turned his head and saw the thick-shouldered swagger of the hard-faced American with the bristling black hair. The man came down the road with a ripe-looking girl in a yellow dress. He gave the squatting group a casual, insolent glance and walked to the MG, planted his feet, and stared down at the two young men seated in the shadow of the car.

"Boys," he said, "we've got a sick woman up there. You're giving up your place in line so we can get her over to the doctor."

The blond boy looked coldly at the chunky man, turned to his companion, and said, "Troy, dear, are we going to fall for a moldy old gag like that?"

"Come on up and take a look at her, if you think it's a gag, boys."

"It's far too hot to go staggering up that bloody hill."

The girl in the yellow dress stared at them with contempt. She said, "Benson, you aren't going to get anyplace with them. To hell with them. The ferry takes two cars. Let's find out who owns this pickup."

"Betty, let me hammer on these boys a little."

"You get funny with us," Troy hissed, "and you'll get something to remember us by."

Bill, squatting nearby, was lifting a cigarette to his lips. He stopped the gesture as he saw the wink of sun on the knife blade in Troy's hand. Two members of his little group stood up slowly and moved away. They wanted no part of any trouble.

The chunky man made as if to turn away. Then he whirled back and kicked hard. Bill heard the thud of shoe meeting wrist. The knife sailed over the little car and landed on the far side. The two boys scrambled up, chittering and mouthing delicate obscenities. As one of them dived to run around after the knife, the chunky Benson tripped him brutally so that he fell flat and hard in the dust. And Benson went after the blond one, brushing aside the ineffectual hands, hammering with cruelly accurate fists. Bill saw the nose pulped, saw the pink mist of blood spray in the sunlight, saw the boy fall back against the car, sagging.

Bill came up onto his feet, reached Benson in three long strides, deftly caught the arm, twisted it, and brought it up between the man's shoulder blades, holding him helpless.

The man craned his neck to stare back over his shoulder. In crude, rattling, almost verbless Spanish he demanded to know what the hell Bill thought he was doing.

"Giving you a chance to cool off, man."

"I thought you were spick. Get your goddamn hands off me."

Bill saw that the dark-haired boy called Troy had retrieved the knife. He pushed Benson away from him, releasing him as he did so.

Benson glanced at the knife, glanced at the contorted face of the boy, and backed uneasily away. The boy with the mashed nose was crying.

"You give him a chance," Bill said softly, "he's going to cut you a little." He turned to the boy. "Put the knife away. I'll keep him off you."

Benson cursed him. "You look like a man, at least. What's the matter with beating up on a pair like that?"

"They aren't doing you any harm. They're just different from you, man. The lady was right. You could have listened to her. That's my truck. If somebody's pretty sick, we can rig up a place in the bed of the truck and take her across that way."

Bill looked at the girl. She was staring at him in very frank appraisal. There was a measuring boldness in her eyes that made him feel awkward.

"There sure is plenty of you, Texas. Weren't you talking Mex a while back?"

"A buck says he's half spick," Benson said with contempt. "Look at the clothes."

Bill stared mildly at Benson. "One more time you use the word, man, I'm going to pound on you a little."

"Proves I'm right," Benson said with contempt.

Bill addressed himself to the girl. "Miss, is he any kin to the lady that's sick?"

"No, he was just helping out."

"Then you send the woman's kin down here and we'll fix it up about how to get her across. Tell your friend there that we don't need any more big wheeling around here."

Benson and the girl went up the hill. She kept staring back over her shoulder. Bill rejoined the group. Benson's back was rigid with anger as he walked beside the girl. Bill gave the group a complete report on the conversation, with only slight editing. The editing didn't help in Pepe's case.

Pepe said, "Did he use a word of insult, Beel?"

"Yes."

Pepe pursed his lips. "That one is bad. A violent one. A cruel one. It is very clear in his face. You must watch him very carefully. And ah, the little darlings. Look how they share their sorrow."

The one called Troy had brought water, taken a clean cloth from their luggage, and was just finishing tenderly swabbing the face of the one Benson had hit so sharply, the one who still wept, hopelessly.

Their voices came silver-thin through the afternoon air.

"It is broken, isn't it?"

"A beast. That's what he is, a beast. If he's still here, darling, when it gets a bit darker, I shall . . ."

"No, it's done. Don't try to get even, Troy."

"I don't think it's a bad break, Daniel."

"You *know* it's just pulp. Pulp."

"Well, even if it can't be perfectly set, perhaps it will give you an air . . . a jauntiness, perhaps."

"I hate all of them, all of them. And that kind the most, Troy. They have to humiliate us to get even with themselves, you know. It's because they have the same . . . slant on life and won't admit it. So they have to go around being terribly 'he,' strutting and making women. I don't hate him, I guess I'm sorry for him, dear."

"I could just claw out his horrid eyes, really."

"Now you stop fretting. I'm going to be all right. I just feel a little sick from the shock. And *look* at that pretty shirt! You ruined it when you fell."

They lowered their voices a bit and Bill Danton could no longer hear what was said.

"You will take the sick woman across in the truck?" Pepe asked.

"If it will help them."

"The truck can be backed up the hill to the store. Perhaps it will be easier that way."

"Good idea, Pepe. See if you can get some sort of sticks so we can spread that tarp for shade for her."

Pepe stood up. "Here comes the one with glasses, Beel."

The boy was approaching, accompanied by the girl in the yellow dress. Bill stood up and saw her point him out.

The boy stuck his hand out, his air becoming just a bit patronizing as he saw the way Bill Danton was dressed. "Miss Mooney tells me you're willing to help us. My name is John Gerrold."

"Bill Danton's mine. Thought we might rig up something in the bed of the pickup. It's six feet long and she could be stretched out. My friend is going to rig a tarp for shade. Ferry ought to be close enough to shore in another half hour. How is she doing?"

"I . . . I don't know. It's terrible. Miss Mooney has been a lot of help. My . . . my wife is with her now. If only the doctor could have come over here!"

"I'll back the truck up the hill and get her when it's time."

"I had to give the man in the store a hundred pesos to let her stay in there. He kept saying it was driving all the customers to the other store."

"Don't worry about it. That's more profit than he's made in the last three months."

John Gerrold looked at the dusty truck with evident distaste. He walked over and stared into it. "I'd like to come along, of course, and bring my wife. But that leaves our car over on this side. I. . . ."

"You're ahead of me and my friend in line," Betty Mooney said quickly. "Look, I can take that Buick across the river. No trouble at all."

"That's kind of you," John Gerrold said.

"Where will I take it to?"

"They've told me the doctor's office is on the public square, on the left. Apparently he has a sign out. Dr. Reinares. You could leave the car there and bring the keys up to the doctor's office, and then your friend could stop there for you when he gets across. I hope it isn't too much trouble."

"Brother, you're giving me a chance to get off this side of the river. I love you for it."

John Gerrold turned toward Bill. "I'd better get back to her. She's in the first store at the top of the hill. I'll be there with her."

Bill saw the tears gleam behind the lenses of the glasses as the boy turned and looked out across the river. John Gerrold said, "She's always been such a good sport about . . . things like this ferry business. She called them adventures."

"She'll be O.K., Johnny," Betty Mooney said.

He turned without a word and went striding up the hill, long legs scissoring slowly, head bent.

"Is she pretty bad?" Bill asked the Mooney girl.

"Whatever it is, it sure isn't a common cold. Mamma's boy is giving his wife a hard time. Seems to sort of blame her. And here's a kick, Mr. Danton. That pair are on a honeymoon. With Mamma along. Tie that if you can."

She seemed unwilling to leave. He gave her one of the cheap cigarettes, lit it for her. She took a drag, clutched at her throat, and coughed. "Sabotage!" she said in a husky voice.

"*Delicados*. You have to get used to them."

She took a second drag, cautiously. "Say, they stand right up and talk back, don't they? You live in Mexico?"

"We've got a farm, my dad and I."

"You make a living off it? I've seen some pretty tired land around here."

"It gets better when you get off the highway. And we're in the flats, so we don't get all the wind and water erosion of the boys who slap those vertical fields against the sides of the mountains."

"Some of those fields that are almost straight up and down look weird."

"Weird, all right," he said quietly. "It takes fifty thousand years for nature to stick a little topsoil on those slopes and nail it down with a decent root system. So some little joker clears it, plants it, wears it out, and it washes away and blows away in three years. Most of the good land in Mexico is washing out to sea. Or blowing up in the air to make pretty sunsets."

"We came through a dilly of a dust storm up in the mountains."

"Treated right, this land will pay off."

"You really knock yourself out when you think about it, eh?"

He gave her a slow grin. "Take it a little serious, I guess."

"What do you think of that Benson?"

"Friend of yours, isn't he?"

"No. I just met him when the old lady got sick."

"Why do you want to know what I think of him?"

"Well, you pushed him around a little."

"I guess I just don't like that kind of guy very much. Those boys weren't hurting him any. He just likes to beat on people."

Pepe came over and said, "Observe the tarp, Beel."

"That's good. Let's back it up the hill. Wait, I'll back it up. You stay here and make certain no one tries to steal our place. Want to ride up, Miss Mooney?"

"I'll walk, thanks."

Bill swung the truck out of line, put it in reverse, leaned out the door, and backed it up the hill. There was more blue in the tree shadows, and some of the brassy look had faded out of the sky.

CHAPTER FIVE

As they had made the turn off the Pan-American Highway at Victoria, to head toward Matamoros, the police sedan had halted them.

The twins, Riki and Niki, in the back seat of the big gunmetal Packard convertible, had been amusing themselves with a bottle of golden tequila, and had been passing it up to Phil Decker just often enough so that he made a serious attempt not to breathe into the face of the mustachioed cop.

Phil's kitchen Spanish turned out to be pretty inadequate and the cop had no English, and so the cop had taken them across to a restaurant where there was a man with respectable English.

When he got the word, Phil held a conference with the twins. They were identical twins, a pair of sleek show-girl blondes wearing identical blue denim play suits. Tequila had made the four blue eyes a bit glassy.

"Like this," Phil said. "There's some kind of delay at the ferry about a hundred miles down the road there, and the cars are getting across too slow. If we stay at the hotel here, we can probably get across in the morning with no trouble. Or we can go to Laredo to cross, which is no dice on account of the one-week stand near Harlingen. We stay overnight, we got to fly like big birds to get settled in and straightened away from Harlingen tomorrow night."

"Woops, we're marooned," said Riki.

"We can take a chance on the ferry, but when these kids say something is bad, it's usually worse."

Niki turned owlish. "Think of our public, Phil. Leave us lay in supplies, advance on the ferry, and picnic as we wait. A hundred miles from now some of the sting ought to be out of this sun."

The suggestion was carried by a vote of two against one, the twins against Phil, and with resignation he procured a picnic of sorts from the hotel. When he got back to the car he found that Riki and Niki had done a bit of foraging, and the bottle supply was once again up to par for the course.

As they had started down the highway, the twins had started to sing again. There were not enough of them, nor was there enough quality, to make it come out Andrews or Fontaine, but it came out lusty, with a nice drive to it.

Phil Decker drove doggedly. The long run at the Club de Medianoche had filled up the kitty, and Sol had lined up enough stands between the border and New York so that they ought to be able to arrive with the kitty maybe a bit bent but not busted.

And this time, he told himself grimly, they were going to make the TV idea work. Sell it to somebody. The kids were young and had talent. And he wasn't getting any younger. The routines would have to be cleaned up, but that wasn't hard. Wangle a few guest spots, and pray. This time the Triple Deckers ought to come through.

He had no illusions about himself. He knew he was a baggy-pants comic with an ugly face, a heavy left hand on the piano, and a sense of timing and pace learned the hard way, learned in crumby clubs from border to border. It was the kids who were going to clinch it for him. A piece of luck finding the kids right when Manny got so sick and had to quit. A pair of Cleveland gals who'd won an amateur contest and had been booked around with a poor act of their own devising. He'd watched them, made the offer, sewn them up, gone to work on them. Now they had a bag of tricks. That gutty singing, and the duet strip. It had been tough talking them into the strip, but after they'd gone through the paces that first night in New Orleans, awkward and darn near blushing all over, the gals had been convinced that he was right. And they had the milkman skit, and the sorority-house skit, and that blackout business with the violin. A fast, rough show, with plenty of long slim legs, and plenty of double-talk that wasn't too coarse.

Well, this was going to be the gamble. The big time, or crawl away on your belly, Phil boy. And the nagging fear came back that maybe the gals had too much class. Somebody would step in and take over and cut him out. Well, the contract was as tight as he could make it, and they'd have to do a lot of scrambling around, but if they wanted to get out of it, they could probably fix it up somehow. Phil Decker had learned about contracts the hard way, too.

There was one way you could tell real class when you ran into it. Riki and Niki were not going to let anybody's bed get in the way of ambition. They never let themselves get separated, and the two of them could certainly handle any pair of eager guys.

He realized he had made a fool of himself in New Orleans, but it had worked out all right. He certainly hadn't wanted to mess with either or both of them, because he knew that could foul up an act quicker than anything. And he knew that neither of them had intended to tease him along, but living like that, having to go into their room, having them get so casual with him that it was as if they thought he was one of those boys they fix up so they won't make trouble around a harem—it had got a little too much to take. And so he'd made that fast pass at Niki and she'd blown up in his face and there had been a lot of yammering and then the big conference, at which he apologized very abjectly and they promised to comport themselves in such a way that he wouldn't be so likely to lose control in the future.

They had been good for quite a while, but lately they'd been getting careless again. Now it didn't seem to bother him so much though. He guessed he was worrying too much about how they'd do in New York. Or maybe just getting too damn old. In the

Mexico City hotel he'd been talking to Niki one afternoon and Riki had come out of the bathroom wearing a big yellow towel knotted around her waist. Riki hadn't seemed to be aware of herself, and you couldn't blame the kid, because there is certainly nothing like a strip routine done for better than a year to make a shambles out of the modesty department. But Niki had remembered and told Riki to go put something on, and Phil had heard himself saying that it didn't make any difference. But she went and put a robe on anyway.

Good kids, and once they'd had a chance, they began to show a natural instinct for timing. Hell of a job at first, because they kept throwing away the best lines, and chopping laughs right down the middle. Had to start right from the beginning. Teach them how to walk as if they were coming down the ramp at the Diamond Horseshoe. Teach them how to push the voice out from the diaphragm, push it out round and heavy enough to bounce off the far corners of the noisiest joint. Riki had a nice talent for the dumb-blonde routine, wide-eyed, mouth a button of shock and surprise. Niki could do the best with a suggestive leer. The Mexican customers as well as the tourists had eaten it up.

The routines would have to be cleaned up a bit. That wouldn't be hard. He hoped they would photograph right for the TV cameras.

Might be able to do something with that knack of Niki's to imitate people. They were singing again. One of them, he didn't know which one, leaned forward from the back seat and nuzzled his neck and handed the bottle to him.

Funny how they both started tapping the bottle at the same time. No harm yet. Always sober at showtime. Made you worry a little bit, though. Maybe something was nibbling on them. Something they hadn't mentioned. They seemed happy enough. Maybe a little wackier than usual, if anything. The drinking had started about the time that big bruiser had taken a shine to Riki. What was his name? Roberts, Robertson. Something like that. Skipped from Boston to play in the Mex league and never went back. A pitcher.

Hell of a thing if one of the twins should fall in love right now. Ruin everything. That night, a week ago, when he went by the room. It could have been one of them crying.

He took a second little knock at the bottle and handed it back. "Take it easier on the singing," he said gruffly. "Don't want you hoarse in Harlingen."

"Are you a little hoarse in Harlingen?" Riki asked.

"Me, I'm a big sheep dog in Denver," Niki replied.

"Yuk, yuk, yuk," Phil said sourly.

"That's his trouble. No sense of humor. Old Mother Decker."

"Old Mother Phil. How about this? Old Mother Phil went up the hill, to get his poor girls a laugh. And when he got there . . . hmmm. . . ."

"The hilltop was bare."

"And so were the girls."

"Hey, it's got to rhyme, you," Riki complained.

"So what rhymes with laugh?" Phil asked.

"Would giggle be better?" Niki asked.

"Try grin. Then you can use gin. Speaking of gin, Mother Decker, how about another knick?"

"Another knick and we all ride in the back seat. Want me to roll this wagon in this countryside?"

Niki stared out the window. She said in an awed tone, "The land that Charles Addams forgot."

"Hey, write that down," Phil said. "Put it in the ad-lib book. We'll use it for snow blindness. You know. Empty joint. Cold crowd. 'Is that a vulture sitting up there?' Niki says looking up, kinda, shading her eyes. We won't use Addams. Maybe Boris Karloff. Something about him forgetting it or something."

"Or a crack about the food in whatever joint it is. Too rough?" Riki asked.

"Too rough. Let's work it around somehow. There's a gag there someplace."

The top of the car was up, as protection against the blistering sun. The back window was unzipped. A pair of red sandals followed by long lithe legs came sliding over into the front seat.

"Getting dull back there," Niki said. "Girl back there thinks she looks like me." She braced the red sandals against the glove-compartment door.

"Everything O.K. with you two?" Phil asked.

"We don't make much money, but we have a lot of fun."

Phil looked in the mirror. Riki had spread herself out on the back seat to take a nap. Niki, beside him, squinted straight ahead at the highway, no expression on her face. Both girls' hair was tied back with red ribbon that matched the sandals.

"We're going to kill them in New York."

"Sure, Phil."

"You got nerves about it?"

"Not a nerve in my head, lambie. Supremely confident, that's me."

He had to be satisfied with that. But he still didn't feel quite right about the pair of them. Somewhere in the immediate past he had lost control somehow. There was something on their minds, something they hadn't told him yet. He crossed mental fingers. Here he was with roughly two hundred and forty pounds of female talent, bursting with health and bounce. Enough to make a man suspicious. How lucky could you get? Too lucky, maybe. Hell, one little phone call to Sol and he could put the Triple Deckers into a Bourbon Street joint from now until Dewey turned Democrat. Maybe that would be the thing. Stick to small time. Forget how the pair would look on a Life cover.

The miles swept at them and were snatched under the droning tires. They topped a small rise. Phil pumped the brake and they eased to a stop behind a blue Cad. A long line of cars and trucks stretched down the hill to the river bank.

"This is the picnic grounds, ladies," Phil said. "Here in this natural retreat, surrounded by the beauties of nature. . . ."

"And house flies."

". . . you will drink in the mysteries of. . ."

"Who said drink?"

Niki and Riki piled out, stretched long cramped legs. They attracted, as usual, open-mouthed attention. When Phil had first taken them in tow, they hadn't known how to handle themselves while being stared at. They had just been a pair of corn-fed beauties who happened to be twins. Now no one could doubt for a minute that they were in show business. They had the air and the walk, and as far as the stares were concerned, they might just as well have been absolutely alone. They'd never given up their cute trick of walking hand in hand, and Phil hadn't made them stop it. They told him they were going exploring. He got out of the car and watched them going down the dusty road, hand in hand, heads shining in the slant of the late-afternoon sun. He decided he was very proud of them.

He saw them move to one side to get out of the way of a pickup truck that was backing up the hill. The truck backed all the way to the end of the line, then swung down through a shallow ditch and up to the front of a tired-looking little store.

A tall young guy in glasses came trotting out, glanced at the truck, and trotted over to Phil. "Are you a doctor?" he demanded.

"No, son. Sorry."

The boy turned on his heel and ran back to the store. There was quite a crowd around, staring in the door. Phil walked over to see what was going on. The big fellow who had driven the truck had gone into the store. As Phil got closer he heard some crisp Spanish and the crowd got out of the way a bit. The big guy and the young fellow came out carrying a stretcher made of a couple of coats buttoned around bamboo poles. There was a gray-haired lady on the stretcher. Phil guessed that if she were awake and on her feet, she'd look like quality.

She certainly looked sick. Face like a washrag. Phil swallowed hard. That was the way Manny had looked when the ambulance came after him. And it made him remember that he was exactly Manny's age. Forty-nine. The gals thought he was forty-two. Stop using the little brush and the bottle, and his hair would probably be the same color as the lady on the stretcher's. Damn hard to be a comic, to think of the punch lines, to dress up the routines, when way down in your mind you kept thinking of death. The years go by so damn fast.

The crowd was very still. Kids watched, wide-eyed. A Mexican slowly took off his big straw hat and then made the sign of the cross. The two men eased the stretcher onto the truck. The boy scrambled in with blankets, awkwardly wedged them under her.

The big Mexican fellow looked around. He turned to Phil and the Texas drawl startled Phil considerably as he said, "If you could back that car of yours up, friend, I could drive out where that ditch isn't so steep."

"Sure," Phil said. "Sure thing."

He went to the car and backed up, giving the truck plenty of room. There was a little girl in the truck now, too. A pretty little bit. Silver-colored hair and a trim little figure. Looked like somebody had given her a bust in the mouth not too long ago. But he couldn't imagine anybody doing that. Probably she fell.

The big fellow tooled the truck through the ditch, creeping it along. When it turned down toward the ferry, Phil moved the Packard up to the back bumper of the Cad and turned it off. He pocketed the key as he got out. He stood, blinking in the sunlight, a small worried-looking man with clown lines around his big mouth, with simian forehead, wearing an absurdly unsuitable pair of maroon shorts with wide white bands down the side seams. His two girls were two dots of pale blue beyond the dust. Phil hiked up his maroon shorts and set off down the road. He had learned, early in life, how to case a house. This one was a crazy mixture. He hoped he'd never have to play to a house like this one. Some round, glint-eyed little Mexican businessman. A mess of *paisanos*. A chunky American who looked like a pro athlete of some sort. Another American looking like a banker, sort of a sad-eyed guy. A big redhead with a yellow dress about to bust in front. Some farmery-looking guys. A big tourist family with a swarm of bratty kids. All of them piled up here, just as they'd come along the highway. Down at the head of the line he found a couple of sour-looking flits, one of them with a flattened nose. Recently done. He wondered why people had been getting pounded around here.

The ferry seemed to be stuck so that it couldn't get close enough to shore. They were propping long heavy planks from the end of the ferry to the shore, blocking them up.

He stood in the road and stared at the ferry. Suddenly he heard a loud frigbtening roar behind him. He looked quickly back over his shoulder, and then made a wild sprawling leap for the side of the road. The front left fender of the big black sedan didn't miss him by more than six inches as the horn blared insolently.

Phil sprawled in the dust. A sharp rock cut his scrawny bare knee. He got up, grunting with anger. He inspected the knee, and then marched down to where the black sedan had slid to a stop. There were two identical sedans.

Phil marched to the driver of the first one. He didn't stop to notice that the man was Mexican or that he was in uniform. Phil planted his feet and yelled, "You tryn a kill me, hah? You nuts or something?"

The driver didn't even turn his head to look at Phil. Two men got out of the other side of the car and came around to him. Phil turned on them and said, "Tell your pointy-headed driver that I got a notion to. . ." His voice dwindled off as he noticed that both these men were Mexicans, that they both had broad faces, broad shoulders, annoyed expressions, and guns on their hips.

"All I'm trying to say," Phil said more gently, "is that it looked to me as though that jerk behind the wheel was. . ."

A big hand was placed flat against Phil's chest. He went sharply backward and sat on the seat of his pants some six feet away. It was not only an indignity. It hurt like hell. He felt as though he had hit hard enough to fracture something. The hefty men turned their backs on him. Others got out—of the same type. He was ignored. They chatted. In the back seat of the lead sedan sat a massive man, white hat brim exactly level above sleepy eyes, ponderous belly resting on his thighs.

Riki and Niki helped him up, one on each side.

"Darling, he hurt you!"

"I don't exactly feel kissed. What the hell is going on here?"

He saw some of them turn and stare at him, supported on either side by a tall blonde. They looked amused. His restless mind started to twist the situation into a possible visual gag. If anything could amuse those gorillas, it must have a slant.

He felt tenderly of his poorly padded posterior and arched his back. "Unhand me, gals. Those kids don't play, do they? Hey, look at all those Mexicans coming around to goop at the big boy in the back seat. Who is he, anybow? The Mexican Gary Cooper?"

The boards had been blocked and the first car of the two aboard the ferry began to inch its way gingerly down.

Phil noticed that all of the men seemed to be armed. He noticed the low numbers of the licenses on the black sedans. Light dawned.

"Gals," he said firmly, "that guy is a politician. Remember the one who came into the club? Yessir. A local Mr. Big."

CHAPTER SIX

When Bill Danton, the lanky Texan, saw the two black sedans come roaring down the road, saw the horn blast the sparrowy little man in the red pants into the ditch, he had a sinking feeling that seemed to be centered in his heart.

He saw the little man object, saw him knocked down, saw the flamboyant twins pick him up. Then Bill moved to where he could look into the lead car, see the face of the man on the back seat. And he knew that there had been nothing wrong with his hunch. That fat sleepy man would no more wait a turn in line than he would try to fly like a *zopilote*, one of the big circling buzzards.

Bill drew back into the natural manner of any Mexican when confronted with a powerful and unscrupulous fellow citizen. He gave all of his attention to the cigarette he was smoking.

John Gerrold jumped down and came around to the front of the truck His eyes looked a little wild. "What's all this about? Why didn't they stop at the end of the line? What are they doing down here?" His pale-haired wife appeared beside him. She too was looking anxiously at Bill.

"I think they get the next ride across, Gerrold. I don't think there's anything anybody can do about it."

"What gives him the right? Who does he think he is?"

"He's the head of a new political party in the northern provinces. His name is Atahualpa. That's not his real name, of course. It's the name of the last Inca king. He claims to have some Inca blood, though I never heard of any Incas in Mexico before. His party is based on some pretty rugged racial ideas. He's nearly pure *Indio*, and ruthless as they come."

"Are you trying to say we won't get my mother across to the doctor on this trip?"

"I've been watching the river. It isn't dropping so fast now.

"Roll 'em under Joe. . . . Here comes the owner."

Maybe this round trip won't take more than fifteen minutes."

John Gerrold turned on his heel and walked toward the group of men. Bill called to him sharply.

John Gerrold had to stop so that the first car that bad come off the ferry could pass. The people in the car grinned and waved and shouted as it sped up the hill.

John Gerrold tried to edge by the circle of men, tried to get close to the lead sedan. He was grabbed and spun back. He poised and leaped at them, swinging his fists blindly.

Bill saw it happening, and he was powerless to stop it. He saw the short vicious chop of the barrel of a revolver. He heard the crisp sound as it met bone. John Gerrold stood quite still for a moment, turned half away, and went down onto his face. The bent glasses skittered a few feet in the dust. One lens was shattered.

His young wife ran to him, knelt beside bim. The men moved away as though a bit embarrassed. She gently rolled John Gerrold over onto his back. Bill saw that Atahualpa bad not even turned his head.

The girl looked toward Bill and cried out, "Can't you do something?"

Bill was conscious that all the spectators had moved back. He felt that he was very much alone. There was the very real chance that Atahualpa would continue to gain power in the government, and he would make a very bad enemy of the Danton family. Obscure rules could be applied. It was even possible that, should Atahualpa achieve real power, the citizenship of Bill's father could be canceled on some technicality, that the wide rich lands, of the Rancho Danton could be handed over, almost for nothing, to some intimate of Atahualpa, or to tbe man himself.

Logic said to lay low, make but the smallest of sounds. Bill was not the least naive about Mexican politics. Both he and his father were conscious, always, of the threat hanging over them—tbreat of a change of regime, a change of viewpoint toward *norteamericanos* tbat would make their life impossible.

But the girl's fine eyes were on his, in helplessness and in appeal. And his father had said, many times, "When you have to do something right, boy, don't stop to count how much money you got in your pants."

Bill walked forward, conscious of Pepe, behind him, saying softly, "No, *hombre!* No."

Atahualpa's guards watched Bill's approach with that mild curiosity of a pack of village dogs seeing a strange cur coming down the village street. They shifted a little.

Bill stopped, raised his voice, and said, "Was Atahualpa responsible for that stupidity?"

Tbree of the guards moved lightly toward him, converging. Bill stood tense. When, from the corner of his eye, he caught the flick of the descending blow, he snapped his head away, felt the stir of the heated air against his cheek. The force of the blow spun the man off balance, and as he took a lurching awkward step, Bill struck down at him with a sweeping backhand blow of a big right fist. It hit the guard behind the ear, driving him down into the dust.

The nearest man gave a grunt of anger and the sun gleamed blue on barrel steel. To Bill all movement became stickily slow, as though the low sun and the blue shadows formed some underwater scene. It was incredible that these guards should have such colossal indifference to the law that they would shoot him, kill him here in the dusty sunlight. And he knew at once that it would be written off as a fanatic's attempt against the life and person of Atahualpa, prevented by his brave guards.

He moved in, ducking low, striking upward at the gun arm, feeling that the portion of a second was stretched out like rotten rubber, would break with the impact of the slug against his face. And the gun hammered the air beside his face, blasting bis eardrum, leaving a ringing, frozen silence.

He stood on his toes, feeling the aim of another gun close to the small of his back, wanting to cry out that had he known how bold the guards of Atahualpa had become, he would never have bothered them, never.

And a deep voice with a bullfrog thrum in it commanded tbe guards. They grasped Bill's arms and ran him up to the car, ran him there with such energy that he craned his head back as his chest struck the top of the doorframe. They pulled him back a bit, so that he could see into the car. Atahualpa sat in the precise middle of the back seat. His belly bulged against the white cotton outfit, the pajama suit worn by workers in the fields. Underneath the level brim of the spotless white sombrero, the eyes, imbedded in dark pockets of flesh, showed nothing, neither anger nor curiosity nor amusement. They were merely eyes. Organs for sight. As the eyes of any creature in the brush. Hands and wrists, heavily haired, rested on the blocky knees, made childish by the weight of the belly, carried like a sack against the thighs. A bright serape, neatly folded, lay on the seat beside bim.

"You know Atahualpa and yet you dared speak in that fashion," tbe voice rumbled.

Bill began to understand bow this illiterate *indio* had achieved so much power so quickly. There was a brutal, elemental thrust to bis personality.

"Because I thought Atabualpa was not a fool, I spoke in that fashion." Bill did not use the slurring idioms of the fields, but the crisp precise Spanish of tbe cities.

The guard on bis left twisted his wrist cruelly, bending it back. Bill felt the gasp build up in his throat, but shut his teeth hard against any such fatal show of weakness.

"Perhaps it can be explained why it is foolish to fend off the attack of a stupid young *turista.*"

"It was not an attack. The mother of the foolish young man is unconscious in the back of that truck. He is desperate to take her across to the doctor in San Fernando. He saw you usurping his rightful turn to cross the river. The ill woman and her son are rich important citizens of the Estados Unidos."

"I do not wish the good wishes of that imperialist nation, or of the *turistas.* The *turistas* have made our money cheap. My people suffer."

"Tbis is not a talk of politics, Atahualpa. This is a talk of mercy. But as you wish to speak of politics, I must ask if Atabualpa wishes to be known as the man who let an elderly señora die because he pushed ahead of her in line? Or as the man who caused an official protest to be made to the *presidente?* I had thought you were not yet strong enough to attract so much attention, señor."

Atahualpa looked at him steadily for long seconds. He gave an order to one of the guards. The man trotted over, stared into the back of the truck, trotted back, and said, "It is the truth."

"Who are you?" Atahualpa asked gently. It was the question Bill had dreaded.

"The younger Señor Danton of Mante."

For the first time there was a flicker of expression in the man's eyes. "Indeed? The Rancho Danton is a rich place. You dress poorly. But I see you have a gringo arrogance."

"Matched by the arrogance of your guards, who would kill without question."

There was another quick order. The men released Bill's arms. He carefully tested his left wrist. It was painful, but apparently not sprained.

Atahualpa leaned over, grunting, and fumbled with sometbing at his feet. He came up with a cheap plastic mechanical pencil. It was the sort given away by the tens of thousands by United States firms. In an imperious manner he handed it througb the window. Bill took it, curiously. He looked at it. On the pencil was printed, "A Friend of Atahualpa." He wanted to laugh. He wanted to laugh so hard that be would drop in the dust, bugging his sides and gasping. He knew his face was reddening.

"Do not say that Atabualpa cannot recognize a service, Señor Danton. You will keep the pencil in a safe place. Atahualpa never forgets a service."

Bill managed to bow and say grave words of thanks and appreciation.

Atahualpa gave a quick order. The man who had fired the sbot turned and tried to run. The others caught him. It was very quick, merciless, brutal. Bill turned his eyes from it and saw the young Mrs. Gerrold do the same. Pepe watched with a look of borrified fascination. When the thick wet sounds of blows had ceased, the gun and gun belt were placed in the second car. Tbe unconscious guard's pockets were slashed and his few pesos removed. He was dragged diagonally across the road, across tbe gray mud, and pulled out of sight behind the brush.

"There are many others who are eager to serve," Atahualpa murmured to Bill. "Who will accompany the sick señora?"

"Her son, of course, and the wife of the son, the girl with the *pelo blanco*."

John Gerrold had regained his senses. He got weakly to his feet, wiping at the thin line of blood that ran down behind his ear into his shirt collar. He leaned quite heavily against his wife, and his eyes were dazed.

When the guards took the stretcher from the truck, John Gerrold made a hoarse protest. Bill grabbed his arm and said in a low tone, "Look, this is O.K. You and your wife are going along. He'll see that you get to the doctor. Just keep your mouth shut."

The unconscious woman was placed, with great tenderness and many sounds of sympathy, in the back of the second car. The displaced guards got into the lead car. The young couple was ushered politely into the second car.

Atahualpa leaned toward the window. "Señor Danton, the doctor will be advised that it will be unlucky for him if he is not able to make the señora well."

"I am deeply grateful."

"I am grateful to you, señor."

The big cars crawled up the blocked planks onto the ferry. The crew removed the planks with astounding dispatch. Crossing the narrow river, the men pulled so energetically on the tow cable that the heavy craft made a perceptible bow wave.

Bill watched closely as it reached the far shore. This time when it stopped, it seemed closer than on the last trip. Shovels flashed in the sun. Men worked like maniacs. The black sedans were like beetles that glittered.

"Boy, you got more guts than sense," a voice said at Bill's elbow.

Bill turned and looked down into the tough face of the man called Benson. Benson seemed genuinely awed. Bill said, "I had a little luck, too. I didn't know I'd get shot at. I thought the worst I could get would be a beating."

"What the hell did he give you?"

Bill showed him the pencil. "This."

"I'll be plain damned! A two-bit pencil. Friend of Atahualpa, eh? Just like a big greaser. Brother, you seem to know this country pretty well. I'd think you'd know that these gooks would just as soon kill you as look at you once they get big enough to wear guns."

Bill looked at the man and looked away. He knew the hopelessness of ever trying to reach the closed mind, of ever trying to explain that there are no people in the world more innately decent and courteous than the Mexicans. True, it was a country of poverty, of great hardship. But out of that poverty were coming men who were truly great, as well as social cancers like the *indio* calling himself Atahualpa, teaching his policy of hate, of blind racial nationalism.

You could almost see the roots of men like Atahualpa being nurtured in the Mexican ghettos of the towns of the Rio Grande Valley. Men like Atahualpa would gain their strength in the northern provinces, where the border tension was a thing that could be felt as easily as the hot weight of the sun.

No, you couldn't take a man like Benson down the main street of the village near Mante, just when the dusk was royal blue, and have him see anything but filth. The huts were small, with packed-dirt floors. Women's hands slapped in endless rhythm at the tortillas, and in the dusk there was love and contentment, a quiet peace of the soul.

Men like Benson would think Mexico was ageless, static, sitting forever wrapped in dreams of mañana. But Bill knew well the truly enormous strides that had been made in the last decade. Education, reclamation, industrialization. Truly, it was a race against time. The *comunistas* bred in discontent, like flies in offal. *Turista* arrogance created no love for the powerful neighbor to the north. But if the great men of the nation could move fast enough, could do enough good in the limited time left, then Mexico, a giant awakening, could take a true and strong place in the ranks of the democracies.

Bill shivered with reaction. There was still a shrill whining whistle in the ear that had been too close to the muzzle blast. He could take no pride in having done what was, basically, a foolish thing. It could have destroyed in a few minutes what Dad had taken twenty years to build. And yet, with an incredible luck, he had come out of it labeled Friend of Atahualpa.

He felt as though this incident had caused an odd awakening. Something in his brain had shifted a bit, formed a new pattern. He wondered if he would continue to be as content as he had been before, content with the work and the planning at the *rancho*.

Benson had wandered away. Pepe moved close to Bill. "I shall now die before my time, *amigo*. There is a damage to the heart."

"To add to the damage already caused by a young lady."

"I do not believe it wise to tell your father, Beel."

"I will tell him. It is a thing he should know."

"Ai! A nice little trip for parts for the machines. I am quieting my nerves by observing the tall twins with the blonde hair. Such statues! Such splendor! How is it possible that they should belong to the little man with the crooked face?"

"Perhaps he has great wealth. Or it was not permitted to break up a set."

"When the trouble came, the twin girls looked on with excitement, and yet a certain calmness. The little man with the crooked face disappeared behind a tree, very wisely, I thought."

"And you?"

"There happened to be a wrench on the floor boards of the truck. It jumped into my hand. Believe me, I did not pick it up. I do not know why I held it. Had they killed you, it would have impeded the speed of my running. The two little darlings of the small automobile left quickly and have not returned. She of the yellow dress dodged between the cars. The hard little man with the wicked face dropped flat in the ditch at the sound of the shot. Everyone was wise except you, Beel."

"And now I am a Friend of Atahualpa. Let us see if we can help the guard who was beaten."

They went to him. Some children stood at a respectful distance, gravely watching the unconscious man. His face was a bloody ruin. They took his arms and dragged him well into the shade. He groaned and put his arm across his eyes.

"How do you feel?" Pepe asked.

The injured man uttered an obscenity.

"Obviously," said Pepe, "his mind is undamaged. The pattern of his thoughts is unchanged."

The man suggested in a ragged voice that both Pepe and Bill depart for the purpose of committing impossible acts on themselves.

Pepe shrugged. They left him there, in the shade, the children still staring at him.

The two boys had come back to their MG. They looked cool, haughty, as though they had arrived at some new mental attitude that enabled them to feel completely indifferent to their surroundings. The face of the injured one had become swollen and dark in the area of the broken nose. It was evident that he would have quite shortly, two stupendous black eyes.

Bill looked across the river. The planks had been set in place and he saw the second car dip cautiously down, gain the foot of the opposite road, and follow the other one up into San Fernando, in a swirl of dust.

"At last," said Pepe, "it appears that we may one day cross this mightiest of raging torrents. And when we are old men, we shall reach Houston. And by the time I return, I will find that my beloved has married a rival and borne seven children."

The two blondes in their denim play suits and red shoes approached Bill and Pepe.

"Do you speak enough English to tell us what was going on?" one asked.

"Just a little political discussion," Bill said.

"Is anybody going to do anything for that man behind the bushes, or do they just let him lie there and bleed?" the other one asked indignantly.

"Let him bleed," said the little man with the crooked face. "Friend, that sounded like Texas talk. Let me introduce myself. Phil Decker. These are my partners, Riki and Niki. We're the Triple Deckers. Been playing the Club de Medianoche. Bet you've heard of us. Got a good play in the Mexico City papers."

"We live out in the sticks," Bill said apologetically.

"What was all the shooting about? Shooting makes me nervous."

"Just a little mistake, Mr. Decker. My name's Danton. Bill Danton." He turned to introduce Pepe, but Pepe had wandered discreetly away. He stood by the truck looking fondly at the two sets of long slim legs under the blue play suits.

"We're number twenty-three or so in line, Bill," Decker said. "How long do you think we'll be stuck here?"

"Looks to me like the river has stopped dropping. If the current doesn't fill up those holes they've dug, they ought to get back on a regular schedule. Say, offhand, ten minutes for each trip."

"Four hours, maybe? Say now, that's all right. Listen, gals. It's a little after four now. We'll be across around eight, be in Harlingen by midnight, anyway."

One of the blondes was staring across the river. Shouts came thinly through the air. Shouts of warning.

"What goes on over there?" the girl asked.

They all stared over. A gray truck was lumbering up the planks. The motor was racing, but it didn't seem to be making any progress. Then, looking like a child's toy in the distance, it swiveled a bit to one side. The back end dropped abruptly. They heard wood ripping and splintering. The front end of truck lifted a bit, wheels turning slowly, and then the whole thing dropped over onto its side. Muddy water shot out in a high hard spray. There was silence, and then more shouting.

"That really does it," Bill said softly. "That does it good. Damn fool raced his motor and spun his wheels on the planks and she went off. Couple of tons of truck plunk on its side right in the way. Mr. Decker, you better add four or five hours to the estimate."

Nearly all of the people who were waiting to get across came running down and crowded on the bank, staring across at this new catastrophe. Bill heard Benson cursing softly, torridly. On the faces of most of the rest was apathy, resignation. The feeling seemed to be duplicated on the far side of the river, where weary men stood and stared at the beast of a truck on its side in the water.

CHAPTER SEVEN

When Linda had heard the grating crack of barrel steel on the skull of her young husband, had seen him turn with a dazed question in his eyes and go down heavily into the roadway, she had forgotten for a time the way his hand had cracked her across the mouth, forgotten his hysteria.

She went to him and turned him over, completely stunned by the casual brutality of the men who had struck him. It was a manner of life completely outside of her experience, and there was enough of the primitive in her so that she did not break down, but instead turned to the nearest possible sources of help, the tall, wind-bitten man with the gray eyes, the quietness in his slow voice.

She looked at him in appeal and saw the weariness in his eyes, sensed his reluctance. For a time she thought he might turn away, and then he flipped the cigarette aside, squared his shoulders, and walked toward the armed men.

She knelt by her husband, reached out, groped for his glasses, put them in her purse without for a moment taking her eyes from the tall wedge of Texan back. As John Carter Gerrold sighed, as a child will in its sleep, she saw the aimed blow and cried out, but her cry came after Bill Danton had dodged the blow, came as his heavy hand swiped down and slammed the attacker into the dirt. It all happened with a frightening speed. She caught the wink of murder in the opaque eyes of another, heard the shot, flattened by space and heat, and did not know in that moment if the bullet had hit Bill Danton. She thought it had, and she remembered his reluctance, knew that the moral guilt was hers. And then they grabbed him and ran him against the side of the car, the two stocky men handling him easily, as though he were a long-legged rag doll.

For a time the man who was her husband, sitting up slowly, slack-faced, was forgotten. She saw the acts in the tableau, but she could not understand the words. John stood up, protesting as they took the stretcher gently from the truck. His face looked bald and naked without the glasses, the eyes peering and vague.

They were urged into the second sedan and it followed the first one up the braced planks onto the deck. There was the driver, and one guard, in the car with them. As soon as the wheels were blocked on the ferryboat deck, the driver and guard got out, leaving the three of them alone.

She saw how pale he was. "How do you feel, John?"

He looked at her as though trying to remember who she could be. "All right. I'm all right. How did this happen?"

"Mr. Danton fixed it. He asked the man to do it."

"He did better than I did," John said bitterly. "Everybody does better than I do. Danton, Benson, that Mooney girl."

"You're doing all you can, John."

"Within the limitations of my ability."

His mother was between them. Now she was a stranger to Linda. She had been a stranger before, also. A compact, merry woman with cool eyes, treating her daughter-in-law as a necessary evil. Treating her not as a person, but as something she disapproved of, yet thought was probably necessary to the well-being of John Carter Gerrold. Like the red bicycle at twelve and the catboat at fourteen and Dartmouth at eighteen. John was the picture, and a toy or a college or a wife were changing frames for the picture. Linda had felt strongly that Mrs. Gerrold had judged her purely on the basis of probable virginity at the time of marriage, and personal cleanliness. There had been the air of "I do hope she will amuse John."

But this strangeness was different. She had ceased to be a human, had become an organism that sucked slowly at the air.

Linda had neither hated nor resented her. In instinctive wiseness, she had merely been biding her time. John could be emotionally weaned, she had thought. There were years to come. Boy-child could become man. And there were more rewards in being married to a man than in having to take over the characteristics of proxy mother. Time was on her side, and proximity would be on her side. Not for a moment had she doubted her eventual victory until, in the dimness of the store, his blow had stunned her.

The river-bank violence had been an oddly shaped wedge driven into her mind, letting in light where there had been no light before. Linda had thought herself wise in the world's ways. She had successfully fought off her quota of amorous drunks, had competed for a living in a vicious half-world where the gentlest words were like knives for the unwary back. And when things get too rough, call a cop.

But that scene on the river bank had been outside her experience. No cop could be called. There was no last resource, except in yourself. Previously the world had been like the case of the two brave, charming kids, that delightful young couple living so valiantly on fifty bucks a week—but with Papa in the background with a boxful of bonds.

Light had entered where before there was no light, and looking at her young husband across the unconscious body of his mother, she felt that she had come to a moment of decision. She had thought herself a tough little realist. Yet she had made the assumption that John Carter Gerrold

"What else can you do besides entertain at the Christmas office party?"

was innately fine and brave and decent and tender and honorable. A rather idealized picture. And, with the new light that had entered her mind, she wondered if perhaps, once the mother image had been destroyed, she would find a man, through selfishness, could become a petty tyrant. Perhaps she had confused weakness with sensitivity.

The ferry moved across the river with all the puffy dignity of a matron crossing against a red light.

She thought there must be some formula you can use about people, some lens to look through. And suddenly she realized that there was one thing she had never considered. Her young husband had a very curious sense of humor. He could see wryness in the world, and he could enjoy irony, but he was absolutely incapable of laughing at himself, ever. She remembered the night in New York when the handle of the taxi door had devilishly insinuated itself into his trousers pocket and the departing cab had ripped the pocket away, exposing his leg through a great triangular tear. She remembered her instinctive laughter, and the stony look in his eyes that had silenced her at once. The damage to the suit could have meant nothing to him; he could afford a dozen. She remembered that his complaints, until he had gone back to the hotel to change, had been oddly close to whining. And she had excused him for that, on the grounds that to any person just learning to stand on his own feet, personal dignity was perhaps a bit too important.

And so the problem could be restated. She could ask herself calmly—can any person lead a happy life with another person who finds it impossible to laugh at himself?

That problem was less complicated, easier to state than to ask if she could live with a man who, out of fear and petulance, could strike her. She thought of the way they had gone away from the others, to the grove far down the river bank. All that had happened in another existence. It had been another girl who had taken her young husband to that place, who had seduced him—a rather silly girl who had believed at that time that the key to marriage was basically sexual. And the silly girl had wept and taken in her arms an unwilling boy whose honesty in love was forever diluted by a shallowness of spirit.

To all of the young girls of the world, she thought, the white knights come riding. They ride out of the story-page castles and the old line drawings, and from their lances waves milady's scarf. And it is something you have to have so badly that you can take a talkative, easily hurt, mother-dominated, egocentric young man and cloak him in all the silver armor of the questing knight.

On this day she had reached out to her husband and found that the story-page Merlin had said his wry incantation, and the knight was forever gone, and she knew in sudden wisdom that the only way she could ever make a marriage of it was to replace the mother image, until, in a Dali horror, he dangled from her breast. Make him dominate her and he would do so, would learn to do so, and would do it with all cruelty of the insecure, complaining about her before others, bringing a tyrant gloom into the home.

The clarity of her insight, the irrefutability of her understanding, and the desperation that came from knowing the true extent of the mistake she had made—all shocked her. She knew that she had grown older on this day, and that John Carter Gerrold would never grow older. It made her think of pictures she had seen of a savage tribe where the skulls of infants are encircled by metal bands, so that in adulthood their heads are a shape of horror. Mrs. Gerrold, with the help of her husband's escape, had managed to bind John's emotions so that though the body became a man, the mind remained that of a clever child. Children never laugh at themselves.

They had reached the far shore. The men worked furiously with shovels, and slowly the ferry was hauled closer until the planks could be set in place and blocked. The cars moved down the planks and roared up the winding road onto pavement that led straight into San Fernando.

"She seems quieter," John said. "God, the way her hands were! I'll never forget it."

"She'll be all right."

"And what do you think you know about it?" he demanded, his voice growing shrill.

She could see him then, as a child, stubbing his toe on a chair, then kicking the chair with all his might, screaming at it. She was something to kick.

"Don't take it out on me," she said softly.

"I think you like all this. I think you hope she dies."

"That isn't worth answering."

He looked at her, and the naked eyes filled with tears. "I . . . I don't know what I'm saying."

They stopped at the public square. The guard smiled and said something in Spanish and made a gesture that said, unmistakably, "Stay right where you are."

He went into the building. He was back soon, with the doctor. The doctor was a small brown man with hollow cheeks and a lantern jaw. He said, "Please, you get out, I get in."

She got out of the car and stood on the cobblestones and watched through the window as the doctor, cricket-spry, hopped in beside Mrs. Gerrold. He put claw fingers on her pulse, moving his lips as he counted. With his free hand he thumbed up her eyelid, then laid the back of his hand against her forehead.

He stepped out, smiling so gaily that Linda knew at once that the illness was not serious.

Smiling, the doctor said, "Very bad. Seek."

"Is there a hospital here?" John asked, his voice shaking.

The little doctor pointed vaguely toward the second story of the building. "Is hospital. My hospital."

"What's wrong with her?" John asked.

Again he smiled so very gaily. "Have not English. A thing in here." He tapped his forehead. "Very bad."

The guard talked to the doctor in brisk Spanish. The doctor kept smiling and nodding. Linda began to realize that his smile was one of nervousness, not gaiety.

The guards went upstairs and came back down with a canvas stretcher. On the canvas was a great stain, a dark reddish brown. Linda felt her stomach turn over as she realized it was blood.

They set the stretcher on the cobblestones. With the doctor still smiling, giving orders, the men carefully moved the woman out and stretched her out on the stained canvas.

John said, "This is no good, Linda. They must have a phone in this town. I'll get somebody down from Brownsville. A doctor and an ambulance. Why does he keep smiling as if it was all a big joke?"

"Shall I try to phone?"

"You go up with her and I'll see if I can phone. What's the word? *Telefono?*"

"*Telefono,* I think. There's an accent on it somewhere."

He started off. She saw one of the guards catch his arm and take him over to the lead car, where the toadlike man sat in the back seat. She followed the stretcher up the flight of stone stairs to the office. To her surprise, the office equipment looked gleaming, modern, expensive. Through an open doorway she could see into a small ward where there were four beds. A child was in one, apparently sleeping. The doctor had the men hold the stretcher level beside one of the beds. A pretty pale-skinned nurse came to help. She stripped the bed back and they eased Mrs. Gerrold off the stretcher and into the bed while Linda watched.

The men put the stretcher down, smiled at Linda, spoke to the doctor, and left. The nurse said something to the doctor. He bent over the bed. He came out to Linda, smiling more broadly than ever.

"Sorry," he said. "Senora is dead."

The smile made it an obscene joke. Linda brushed past him and stood over the bed. The nurse eyed her gravely. Linda looked down at the damp gray face of the dead woman.

The doctor appeared at her elbow with a glass. "Dreenk, please," he said smiling.

She drained the glass mechanically. It was water with something added that gave it a faintly bitter flavor. The doctor took the empty glass.

He said, "Body go to Estados Unidos, yes?"

"Yes."

"Bad heat. Is better icē. Is a man here in San Fernando can fix and take body to Matamoros, yes?"

"My husband will decide."

"Yes."

And she heard his familiar steps on the stone stairs. She turned and met him as he came across the office. He tried to brush by her, saying, "Where is she?"

Linda caught his wrists. "Please, darling. She . . . died, just a minute ago."

He looked at her vacantly. "Eh? What?" He snatched his

hands away from her and went to his mother. He flung himself against the edge of the bed, kneeling on the floor, his face against the sheet beside her, one arm flung across her. He cried, vocalizing each sob as children will. His spasms shook her, so that in a horrid moment it seemed to Linda that the dead woman was suppressing laughter that shook her body. The doctor stood smiling. John's sobs began to sound like laughter. She felt the emptiness and dizziness as the room darkened. It was the nurse who saw it. She came quickly to Linda, took her arm, led her into the outer office to a chair, made her sit down, pushed her head forward gently until Linda sat with her head between her knees. Darkness moved back and away from her, and the singing sound left her ears. She straightened up and listened to John weep and knew he was done, finished. He would make no decisions.

She stood up tentatively, and then went to him. "John!"

"Leave . . . me alone!"

"The doctor says there's a man here who can take the body to Matamoros. You have your papers and hers, and you can get her across the border and arrange for the body to be shipped to Rochester. Can you do that? Are you listening?"

"I . . . I'll go with her."

"How about our car? I better go back and get it. Where will I meet you?"

"I don't know."

"Tell the Brownsville police where you register. I'll check with them. Will you do that?"

He didn't turn. "Yes," he said, his voice muffled, mouth against the sheet.

"You gave that girl the car keys?"

"Yes."

"Give me some money."

He took his wallet out of his pants, handed it blindly back to her. She took it, opened it, took out several twenty-peso notes and fifty dollars in United States currency. She put the wallet on the edge of the bed beside his hand. She looked at his hand, then bent over and looked at it more closely, wondering why on earth he should be holdly so tightly to a cheap yellow mechanical pencil. She hadn't seen it before, in his pocket.

"Any Brownsville undertaker will ship the body to Rochester."

"Please stop talking to me."

"Maybe in Matamoros you'll have to phone an undertaker to come across the river to get the body."

"I'm not a child. I can do what has to be done."

"Maybe you should come back with me and let the doctor's friend handle it."

"She's dead now. You don't have to be jealous of her any more."

Linda turned and walked out. She went down the stone steps and out onto the narrow sidewalk. It was perceptibly cooler, and the buildings on the west side of the square cast shadows that touched the bases of the buildings on the opposite side. The black sedan had gone. From a corner cantina came the thin strains of a guitar, a nasal tenor singing *"Maria Bonita."* A pup trotted sideways down the middle of the street. A ragged child appeared from nowhere, saying, *"Un centavo, señorita, Un centavo, por favor."*

She turned toward the river, walking slowly. The child followed chanting.

She felt insulated from all the world, as though she walked inside an invisible capsule through which all sound and vision came dimly. She guessed that it was the result of whatever the doctor had given her. It seemed good to be walking, and to be alone. Two young men leaned against the outside wall of a pink building. They followed her with their eyes. When she was ten paces beyond them, she heard the low whistle, *"whee-whew,* the favor that all Mexican males seemed to feel obligated to award to any pale-haired girl.

It no longer seemed important to think of her marriage as a dilemma. She would go on with John, or she wouldn't. She had been tricked. She had given her body to the white knight who had never been. Given it with a high eagerness.

The sidewalk ended and the wide shoulder of the road was hard-baked, pebbled. The chanting child gave up the pursuit. She passed a gas station, a soft-drink stand. She wished that she would never reach the river, would merely walk on through this dusking day. Women passed her balancing vast bundles of cotton clothing on their heads—clothing that had been washed in the mud of the river, dried and bleached in the hot sun.

The road circled down the edge of the river bank, and as she came around the turn she saw the truck on its side, oddly helpless, like a horse that has fallen on the ice. Men squatted in the water, grunting and sweating over jacks and blocks. There seemed no organization in their efforts, no one to direct the operation. Only four cars waited on this side of the river. Looking across, she saw that the road on the far side was now entirely in shadow, the sun having sunk low enough to be cut off by the crest of the hill, and soon this bank, too, would be in shadow. She could see that the MG and the pickup still headed the line and knew that this truck must have fallen from the planks into the river soon after the two black sedans had disembarked.

She stood a long time, placidly, just watching them. She was in no haste to make a decision of any kind. The effects of the sedative still clung, like cotton, to the fringes of her mind, and it was almost with a sense of loss that she felt the effect diminishing, fading.

A gnarled boatman came grinning up to her, gesturing, pointing to her, pointing across the river, pointing down to a flat-bottomed scow. He kept holding up three fingers saying, *"Solamente tres pesos, señorita."*

She stared at him blankly for a time, and then nodded and followed him down to his boat. He steadied it as she got in. She sat on the middle seat as he directed, the skirt of the tan linen dress tucked around her knees. He sat in the stern and sculled it across with a single oar, keeping the blunt bow pointed upstream, so that the boat, angling across, made her think of the pup who had trotted down the middle of the San Fernando street.

Bill Danton left the group he was with and sauntered down to meet her, his thumbs tucked under the belt of the khaki work pants. He pulled the bow up, gave her his hand, and helped her out. She turned and handed the boatman his fee. He bobbed his head and grinned and grimaced.

"What happened?" Bill Danton asked.

"She . . . died. Just as we got her up to the doctor's and got her into bed she. . ."

And without clearly knowing the reason, she found that she was crying. And it was not the death, not that loss. It was another loss, a different thing entirely, that had been taken from her on this day, leaving her with an emptiness beyond description and beyond belief. And his arm was surprisingly light around her shoulders, and the soothing sounds he made only made the tears come faster.

CHAPTER EIGHT

For Darby Garon, the middle-aged adulterer, there was the torment of the sun, and the greater torment of remorse and self-disgust.

Far down the road there was some kind of scuffle, a man falling down in the dust, the pale-haired girl going to him. And then another man and a scuffle and someone falling.

Suddenly his attention was ripped away from the distant scene when one of the children playing in the road hit him in the belly with a stone hurled so hard that it felt like a blow from a hammer.

He glared around. The children were not playing any more. Some of them had drifted down the road. Others had been called back by their parents. Damn fools who couldn't teach their children a little common consideration. The blow had given him an oddly hollow feeling.

Suddenly he felt a warm wetness, a stickiness around his groin. He opened his shirt and looked at where the stone had hit him. There was a small hole, and blood ran slowly out of the hole and down under his belt.

And he knew that there had been a shot and he said, aloud, "I'm shot!" It sounded like a remarkably stupid and self-evident thing to say. And he was filled with surprise rather than panic. Gangsters get shot. Soldiers get shot. Darby Garon, executive, does not get shot. But there was the hole, with little raw edges, and one cannot very well refute the evidence of a hole in one's own belly. The shot, a wild one, had apparently come out of that scuffle down there by the river bank.

One must be logical in all things. If one has a bullet hole in one, it is well to have it tended to. He remembered what he had read about being shot in the belly. In Civil War days it was invariably fatal. In World War I days, it had been damn serious. But now, with sulpha and penicillin and so on, it was

just an abdominal operation, with the perforated intestines sewed up, and a handful or two of magic powder tossed in the incision, and a month of bed rest.

A sudden cramp pulled his lips back from his teeth. He shook his head. It felt just like a bad case of gas. Suddenly the Mexican escapade diminished in importance, and Betty Mooney was not someone to hate. She was someone to help him. He looked around and saw her, far down the road.

Might as well wait until I feel a little stronger, he thought, and then get close enough to yell to her. Said she did some nursing work once upon a time. She'll know how to handle this.

The second cramp was worse than the first. It banged his knees up against his chest. He slowly forced them down again, taking a deep breath, closing his eyes for a bit. Panic began to stir around in the back of his mind. He forced it aside. Hell, you could live for days with a hole in your belly. Or could you? Didn't it have to miss important organs? He squinted down at the river bank and then looked at the hole again. He carefully pulled his shirt back over the hole, tucked it in gently. He wedged his hand under his belt so that the heel of his right thumb was pressed hard against the wound. It made it feel a little better. When he didn't look at it, it felt as big as a dinner plate. He had to keep remembering the size of it, the exact size. Now, with a slug coming from that angle, where would it be? He used his left hand to feel around in back of himself. He felt no stickiness. So the thing was still in there. A little lead pellet. He remembered buying the older boy a .22, and how they had plinked at tin cans out near the woods. You had to keep telling a kid that those little things can kill a man, or a boy.

Maybe it could lodge in a kidney or something. What would that do? Live for days. Just a case of getting attention.

A man walked by. Darby started to call to him, but just as he opened his mouth the third cramp tortured him. He felt as though a big hand was grabbing his guts, and twisting hard, holding tight, then slowly letting go. When he opened his eyes again and got his knees down, the man was gone.

Damn silly situation. Make you feel a little stupid and helpless. Goddamn that girl! Why didn't she come up and see how things were going? Be a hell of a joke on her if he died. Nice job explaining it. Executive goes on marital vacation. Dies on river bank in Mexico. Mistress implicated. Says she was not anywhere near Garon at time of death.

Stop thinking that way. There's a lot in this thinking business. Think of something long enough and hard enough and it happens to you. Every time. Like wanting that dream house. Moira got it, too, finally. Lot of work, lot of years. But she got it.

Panic grew stronger and, with rat teeth, made lace of the edge of his mind. He got his feet under him, craned his left hand back, and braced it against the trunk of the tree. Now, one little push, Darby, and you'll be on your feet. Then you can walk forty paces. Hell, you've been walking all your life. No trick to it. Just one foot in front of the other.

He shoved mightily and rocked onto his feet, doubled over. He felt curiously weak. The strength didn't run out of a man that fast. A cramp hit him before he could take a step. The cramp pressed his buttocks down against his heels and he rocked back, the tree striking him in the back again. The world tilted and slowly regained an even keel. The cramp faded, but this time it didn't go away entirely.

Take a little rest and then another try. This is a lot of silliness. More guts than this in the Garon clan. Remember Uncle Ralph? Chopped right through his boot and severed three toes and walked home. Nine miles, they said it was. Home with a grin and a white face and a boot full of blood, falling face down in the kitchen.

And, waiting for the strength to try again, he knew sourly that he was going to die. The panic of a few minutes before had faded utterly. Dying was now a damn inconvenience. Bonds in bad shape. Never changed the insurance options like Harry suggested. Damn little in the checking account, too. Moira would have to get a loan until the insurance was paid off. Harry would fix it for her, but she wouldn't like having to ask. Maybe he'd have sense enough to offer it to her.

What are you talking about, man? There are a lot of years left. A lot of suns coming up. Grandchildren to spoil. And that trip to take, the trip Moira wants. Acapulco, Rio. Trip you've been saving for, as much as taxes will let you.

Got to get the car back, drive that bitch to San Antone. Or did she come from Houston? Hard to remember which. So you had a merry three-week roll in the hay, and now you're shot in the belly, and a very just little punishment it is. If that hole had been four inches lower, it would have been an even juster punishment. It would have done a good job on the equipment that got you into this jam. If thine eyes offend thee. . .

His chin was on his chest. He lifted it with great effort. The scene wavered a bit and then came clear. Startlingly clear. He could see the muddy river, the far shore. Ferry was on the other side. The black cars going up the road. And a small figure over there. . .

Hell, what had been the matter with his eyes! Even at that distance, you could tell the brown hair, and that sweater and skirt. Bought that outfit for her for her birthday. God, that was a long time ago. Thought she'd worn it out and thrown it away, long ago. One thing about Moira. She always used her head. One sharp girl. Traced him somehow. Came riding, riding, riding up to the old inn door. No, wrong line. Came riding to the rescue.

He grinned at the figure of his wife on the far shore. Now everything was fine. Sure, even at that distance he could read her eyes. He could read the sweet forgiveness, and the understanding. She knew the answers. She'd tell him why he'd done this thing to the two of them, and he would understand when she had told him.

The sweet kid, she was standing over there with books held tightly in her arm, just like during those campus days.

That was her way of showing him that everything was all right. A nice symbol. A nice gesture.

He got easily and quickly to his feet, bounded down through the ditch, and went swinging down the road, his head high.

She saw him, and she lifted her free arm and waved. And he broke into a run. Hadn't run for years. Thought I'd forgotten how. But look at me go! Just like the coach said. Knees high and a lot of spring in the foot and stay up on your toes, Garon.

Running, running, with the wind in his face, running by all the surprised people who thought he was too old and too tired to run. And the river bank was speeding toward him, the way you'd see it from the windshield of a fast car. And Darby Garon went out in a flat dive, hitting the water, knifing down through the water, down through the blackness, feeling it against his face, like dark wings, knowing that he would rise to the surface and she would be close, and there would never again be any problems between them. With his arms straight out in front of him, and with a smile on his lips, he knifed through the blackness, waiting forever for the moment when he would begin to rise toward the surface.

CHAPTER NINE

Riki, unaccompanied by her twin blonde sister, walked slowly up the road to the car. Funny kind of dusk they had here. Not like the ones they used to have in Ohio when she was a child. Here it was all yellow, glaring, one minute, and then—poom! —purple like the dresses Granny used to wear for best, and the stars began to show on the eastern horizon almost before the sun was down.

She got into the Packard, unlatched the top, pushed the button. The top went up and then slid slowly down into the well with an asthmatic whining. She climbed into the back and lit a cigarette. The tequila glow had faded to a bad taste in her mouth. She considered refurbishing the glow from one of the unopened bottles and then gave it up.

Riki and Niki. Even the names were cheap and phony. How dumb could you get?

What did Granny use to say? Would some power the giftie gie us. . .

Well, that guy from New York had really pulled the rug from under them.

Been a lot better if they'd gone right on from high school, even if it meant waiting on tables. Northwestern was handy.

Sooner or later they were going to have to tell Phil. A sweetie. Anxious little guy, sweating and fuming and working, with that big dream ahead of him, the dream he'd got too old for.

Gee, she thought, after we saw how that duet strip went over in New Orleans, we thought we really had something. It seemed kinda cute, damnit. Phil had worked it up. Just a simple backdrop with a doorway cut in it, and the doorway was supposed to be a mirror. They'd practiced making the same moves so that people said it really did look like a mirror. And there was a dressing table over at the side. They took turns being the girl

behind the mirror. With the music going, you just sat at the dressing table and put on one of the hats and tilted it right, and then went over and looked at yourself in the full-length mirror. The girl on the other side was dressed the same as you. And with the second hat, they began to get the idea, when they saw that the mirror image was wearing fewer clothes each time, even though the girl in front didn't take a thing off. Gee, they'd hollered and stomped enough in New Orleans, and in Mexico too. The first few times were tough, all right, because you kept thinking how Granny would have whaled the tar out of you if she'd seen what you were doing.

But Phil said a little strip kept the act alive, and you got good practice out of the rest of the routines. And so you got sort of accustomed to showing yourself off, and it helped to know that there was something to show.

God, how we used to talk it over when we were little kids. Little Mary Anne and Ruthie Sheppard, yaking to all hours of the night in that big bed, about how we were going to be an act. Singing and dancing. The Sheppard Sisters. Learning all the popular songs.

The big night was winning that amateur thing. And having the man sign us up to compete against the winners of the other amateur things. And when little Phil turned up with his sarcasm, and telling us we didn't know a damn thing yet, and he could help us, gee, how we jumped at it!

He made us work, all right, and he's a nice guy, and he means well, and how could he possibly know that he was teaching us all the wrong things?

That guy from New York, he fixed us good, him and his fancy friends. They caught the show, a whole tableful of them, and when he sent the note back for us to join their party, just the two of us, not Phil, Phil read the note and his eyes went real wide open and he said, "Jimmy Angus! Say, I heard of him. Mixed up in musicals in New York. A big shot. Look, gals, be on your best behavior. This could be a break."

So we went to the table and there's that trick we used since we were kids, of Mary Anne starting sentences and me finishing them without a break. Funny now to think of her as Mary Anne instead of Niki. Got used to Niki, sort of.

Well, it seemed to go over pretty good, and we worked in some of the gags that we learned from Phil, and they all laughed like crazy, and maybe we should have known because there was a funny little edge in all the laughing. They weren't really with us.

Jimmy Angus was a big skinny guy, sort of old, and the girl with the boy's haircut was his wife and she used to be an actress, and then there was a fat agent from Hollywood, and the redhead, and some young guy with an old bag of a wife, and some spare people.

It's hard to figure out now whether it was a mistake to go to the hotel suite with them all or not. Maybe we'd have been better off to go ahead being dumb. It certainly was one hell of a big layout there in the Del Prado. Biggest hotel suite I ever saw. With a bartender from the hotel all set up in a little alcove, and more people coming in, and we finally got the drift that they were all down there figuring out some kind of angle on doing a Mexican movie. It was pretty hard to follow a lot of the conversation. We stuck close together, as usual.

We thought we were sort of like friends, and for a while there it was kind of exciting, because they certainly all acted famous, even though we hadn't heard of any of them.

Phil had told us to be on our best behavior, so we did a lot of drink-nursing. I didn't get the drift at all when Jimmy Angus started arranging a table, but then when he came out with an armload of hats and dumped them on the table, it began to worry me.

He banged on a glass, like at a banquet for the speaker, and he said, "And now for your pleasure, Angus and Company present the show-stopper from the Club de Medianoche—Riki and Niki and their very obvious talents. Let's go, gals." He trotted over to one of those little pianos and began the theme we use for the act, "Lovely to Look At."

We looked at each other, and we always seem to think alike and get the same reaction to things, and I knew we'd both fallen flat down with a big thud. We'd thought we were guests, and now we were supposed to strip for this crazy drunk crowd. It was tough enough to do it in a club, but in a club it was sort of impersonal; we weren't going to undress in anybody's living room, that was for sure.

"No," I said. "No, please."

The fat agent came over and gave us a sort of greasy smile and he handed us a fifty-dollar bill each and said, "For that, ladies, I think you can go on with the act, without making that little concession to censorship like you do at the club."

By the time I'd figured out what he was saying to us, that he expected us to go through with it completely starko, he'd eased back away from us, and there we were with our bare faces hanging out and the fifties in our hand, and everybody looking, and that Jimmy Angus, grinning over his shoulder at us from the piano bench, still doing our theme. We said no again and they kept applauding and stamping their feet and some jerk was yelling, "Take it off! Take it off!"

And we tried to head toward the door, and some guy came trotting over, a little bitty guy, and he said in a big loud voice that stopped the music, "These little girls are shy, folks." Little girls! He came up to my chin.

He went on and said, "What they need is a little rehearsal. Louie, I'll reimburse you for the hundred bucks, and these little lovelies and I, why, we will retire to a private chamber and get in some practice."

Another guy elbowed in and said, "And by God, for another hundred they'll practice with me, too." All the women yelped like they were shocked or something. The little guy was wiry, and he tried to steer us down toward a sort of hallway.

Mary Anne and I have always worked pretty well together on wise guys. It's something we worked out as far back as eighth grade. She spun him and I hit him, and while he was still spinning she hit him as he came around, and she was crying, and it knocked out a funny little bridge and he fell down and Mary Anne kicked him in the chest. We were both crying then, and it stopped all the noise so you couldn't hear a thing except the little bitty guy saying bad words and crawling toward that little bridge.

We got out the door and Jimmy Angus caught us at the elevator. He had a different look on his face. He said, "I want to talk to you girls."

"And you can go to hell," Mary Anne said, with sobs in her voice like broken springs in a bed.

"I want to tell you something for your own good."

I told him I wouldn't go back in there with those crumbs for a thousand bucks. He told us we didn't have to, and he was very persuasive and he got us down the hall somehow and into a small bedroom. We sat side by side on the bed. He leaned on the bureau with his arms crossed and a cigarette bobbing in the corner of his mouth as he talked. He said, "I'm not going to apologize for what I did. I was misled. Where do you girls come from?"

We didn't want to talk, but he got it out of us, a little bit at a time, until we were interrupting each other to tell him the whole thing. He kept nodding.

Neither of us will ever forget what came next. He took a long time butting his cigarette. He was frowning. "So O.K. So you're a couple of good-looking girls from Ohio. Young and healthy and good. I could kid you along. But I owe you something for what happened in there. That Decker. He's taken a couple of nice kids and turned them into a fair imitation of brass blondes. He's taught you to talk and walk and act like a pair of high-priced whores. He's turned you into a pair of burlesque types. A lot of fine comics have come up from burlesque. They came up because they had sense enough to change their styles and grow. Decker will never be anything but one of the less clever baggy-pants boys. I imagine you girls want to stay in show business. I say, get out. Your voices are true, but too small. Neither of you has the instinctive grace of born dancers. Your only stock in trade is a pair of beautiful bodies and a blue routine. You've had your kicks playing joints with Decker. Go home and get married and have beautiful babies. Now don't interrupt. You can go on with Decker, and I'll tell you exactly what will happen. You'll play joints until your voices sound like whisky tenors. You'll go on and on until you start to sag, and by then Decker will be through, and all you'll have left is heartbreak. And don't be too rough and too indignant when people figure you're both pushovers. Decker has taught you to look like a pair of pushovers. We got you up here for laughs. So we didn't get any laughs, and maybe you made us feel a little ashamed."

He took out a card and scribbled on it and tossed it into Mary Anne's lap. "If you're too stubborn to take good advice, the least you can do is ditch that crumby little comic. Go to the

address on that card. He's a friend of mine. He'll place you somewhere in New York after he cures you both of the phony tricks Decker's taught you. Maybe some big club where all you have to do is wear fancy costumes and walk around for the baldies to lick their chops at."

On the way back in the cab we told each otber that Jimmy Angus didn't know sugar from Shinola. We were whistling as we walked past our personal cemetery. Angus had shown us the cemetery. With one stone saying Niki and one saying Riki.

Phil was waiting up, all excited about what had happened. We told him that Jimmy Angus had told us to give him a ring in New York. You'd think somebody had just told Phil he'd won a raffle.

The next day we tried to talk Phil into taking the strip out of the routine. It was as easy as taking away his left arm.

What Angus had said worked on us. We talked it over. Niki put it in words finally. She said, "Face it, Buster. Angus gave it to us straight. He opened the window and some fresh air blew in. But can you tell Phil? Can you?"

We knew how much he was counting on us. And we knew the dream. It would have killed the little guy. He was thinking that now he could get into the big time before it was too late for him. We heard tbe lines with new ears, and watched each other with new eyes, and we began to feel cheap and ashamed and tricked. The life went out of the act, and the applause lost its edge, but Phil didn't seem to notice. And the same way we've always done everything together, we seemed to find out at the same time that a wee dollop can make tbe world right rosy and make you forget that a big suite full of smart show people thought you were a flooze pair because that's what you had been taught to act like.

"Any time you need advice, Old Man, just whistle. I know that dame like a book."

Riki lit another cigarette. The decision had been made. They had decided to ride along with Phil Decker because they knew they couldn't hurt him tbat badly. And, she thought, it would have been O.K. if they'd been able to keep moving. You keep moving and you can stop thinking. But get a big fat delay like here at the ferry and you start turning it over and over in your mind again. The card Angus had written on was carefully tucked away. Ugly little man with sparrow legs in those absurd red shorts. Ugly little man with his tired jokes and his big dream. What would happen to him? But, on the other hand, who were they to toss themselves away for the sake of his impossible dream? She took a hard drag on the cigarette. Get to New York and then make the break? No, if any break was going to be made, it ought to be here and now, here in the protecting darkness of the night.

Niki appeared out of the darkness and leaned against the side of the car. Her voice was dull. "Sitting this one out, baby?"

"Sitting and thinking."

"Keep it up. You might bave beginner's luck."

"That's Phil's line."

"They're all Phil's lines, baby."

"Mary Anne, I. . ."

"I know, Ruthie. I've been thrashing around the same way. There's a long life ahead. Sure, he's a sweetie."

"Can we do it?"

"It's dark now. That seems to help a little. Think how blissfully happy we'd be, baby, if we'd never met one James Angus. Right now, it all seems kind of nightmarey. Right now I can't believe I've bared my fair white body for the public. Can you imagine what Granny would say?"

"Be a busy woodshed."

"And food standing up."

"I'm laughing and I feel like crying."

"You know, he's uneasy. He's sensed something wrong. He's a little worried."

"How about a jolt? Will that help?"

"Let's not. It may make us so sentimental, we'll drop the whole thing."

"How are we going to say it?"

"Open up the subject and let the words come."

Instinctively they reached for each other's hands, held tight.

"Agreed?" Riki asked softly.

"O.K. We do it. Sit tight. He'll be hunting us up in a little while."

Niki joined her sister in the back seat of the car. They sat together and there was no need for any more words. In ten minutes Phil Decker came wandering up the road.

"Hey, there you are!" he said, peering into the car. "I think I got a skit figured. We put Niki in a tight skirt leaning on a prop lamppost, see, smoking and swinging a red pocketbook and looking at her watch and stamping her foot to show she's waiting for some guy who's late. I walk by her and turn about and give her the old double take, and then come back casual-like, see. Then—"

"We want to talk to you, Phil," Riki said in a low voice.

"Eh? Don't you want to hear the skit? It's tricky. See, Niki is waiting for a streetcar, but we get the yuk out of it being a streetcar named desire, and the little guy, that's me, gets it wrong and thinks that she. . ."

"We want to say something to you, Phil," Niki interrupted. "So why don't you get in the front seat and listen?"

"Something wrong? Hell, don't worry about the ferry. We'll get across sometime tonight." He got in the car, turned to face them.

"It's more than that, Phil," Riki said. "Honestly, we're terribly grateful for everything you've done for us."

"But," said Niki, "we want to split."

The silence was heavy. Phil slowly took out a cigarette, lighted it. He let the flame burn for a few seconds before he snapped the lighter shut on it.

"You maybe think that's simple or something?" he said in a harsh voice. "You maybe think you snap your fingers and we're all done. I knew something's been eating on you two. I've had my hunches. Well, let me tell you something. Without old Phil keeping you in shape, you two will be finished in a month."

"We'll take that chance," Riki said, glad that he had taken that attitude.

"You might, and then again you might not," Phil said coldly.

"How do you mean that?"

"It's pretty tough to fool old Phil. I caught that Angus angle. He figures he can use you. Use you is right. He won't do you any good. You can bet on that. Hell, I could see it all shaping up."

"We've talked it over, Phil," Riki said. "And we want to break it up."

"There's a hell of a distance between wanting to and doing it. Don't forget that. I got your names on a little piece of paper. Maybe it don't seem like much to you, that little piece of paper, but let me tell you it's protection. There's no way you can sneak out of it, believe me."

"We talked that over a couple of weeks ago, Phil. We got to appear with you, O.K. But Lincoln stopped slavery. We'll stand there, and you can make all the jokes you want, and it still goes as fifty-fifty split."

"I'll wait you out, then. We won't work at all."

"We'll work, Phil. We'll wait tables. How long can you wait?"

He suddenly tilted back his head and laughed harshly. "What the hell am I yaking about? Hell, I'm making it sound as if I need you. I need you two like I need a point on my head. I've been doing you a favor. Phil, the softie. Well, it goes to show you. You can't take a couple of farm kids and make show business out of them. I thought I could. So I was wrong. Now I'll give it to you. You got no talent. Neither of you. People beat their hands together on account of my jokes and on account of you're both stacked, which is something you were born with. I'm going to pick myself up some real pro gals. A pair that knows the score. Any time you want to come crawling back, write me care of Variety and I won't answer the letter. You can mail it in a hole in the ground and get the same answer. We'll drive to Brownsville and split the kitty and you can take your clothes. The costumes belong to me, don't forget. And you can take that contract which I am going to hand to you, and you can pin it on the wall where you can look at it in the middle of the night when a mess of squalling brats wake you up, because, gals, without me, you're just going no place at all in the entertainment business. I've been a sucker, but it's no skin off. You give me some laughs to remember, and, gals, this is the biggest laugh of all."

He slammed the car door and went down the road. His walk was jaunty and he was whistling one of Berlin's oldies as he walked away.

"The poor little guy," Riki said softly. "Maybe we ought to give him a year. One more year."

"No, baby. We said it. We did it. We'd never have the guts to do it twice. Leave it lay."

"But he's such a sweet little old picked chicken."

"Sweet and dumb and hopeless, Riki. Ruthie, I mean. Riki and Niki are dead."

"The Sheppard twins it is."

"What will happen to him, baby?"

"Who knows? Beer joints. My guess is he'll pick up some poor kid and make a stripper out of her and ride on that as far as he can. And maybe she'll never meet a Jimmy Angus. Did you know the little guy was so proud, Ruthie?"

"We shot him right through the heart. Proud of us?"

"I don't know yet. Wait till I stop bleeding."

"A knock?"

"I'm off the stuff. Did you see him strut away, whistling?"

"A picture to go in my locket."

"Did you ever hear the one about the midget and the locket?"

"That one is Phil's."

"Own up, Sis. For the rest of our lives we'll probably be using his lines."

"And remembering the little ferry that couldn't."

"Getting a little maudlin, ain't we?"

"Turn your head. I'm going to cry, just a little."

"Maybe you better wait until I'm through."

They sat in the dark car and put their long legs up on the top of the front seat. The night air was soft.

After a long time, Mary Anne began a song, softly, sweetly. Ruthie joined in on the second bar. One of the first songs they had learned.

Their voices were like silver in the night. "I love to tell the story. 'Twill be my theme in glory to tell the old, old story. . . ."

And, fifty yards and nearly thirty years away, Phil Decker heard the sweetness, and he hit his thigh with his fist, again and again.

CHAPTER TEN

Del Bennicke, the tough, stocky fugitive who was calling himself Benson now, counted up and realized he had gone thirty-two hours without sleep. He began to have a somewhat clinical attitude toward himself. It was like being in that stage of drunkenness when you cannot be absolutely certain that you are making sense to others. Fear kept him sleepless, kept him walking on the ends of his nerves, and exhaustion kept him from planning adequately or properly, kept him also from worrying about the quality of his planning.

Somehow, it was going to come out all right. It always had. One minute he would think that. The next instant he would be sweating.

You used people to get you out of jams. Be fast enough and you could foul up the situation so good you were lost in the crowd.

That little fracas with the guards of the fat politico had set him up, somehow. Made him feel better. For a minute he had thought they had come for him, and then he saw that they'd been going too fast to look at license plates, were interested only in hogging the ferry and getting across the river.

Stepping in to help the old doll when he'd seen her sick in the car had been a good gag. It had given him a chance to get next to some strangers, get a good look at them. It had given him the opening with the Mooney girl. And that might shape up just right. The job was to get to San Antone. Somehow it would work out. It had to work out.

When Bennicke had heard and understood enough of Texas' conversation with the fat politico to know the situation was over the hump, he had stood up and watched with mild interest the way the eager guard was disciplined.

Bennicke saw the sick woman transferred to the second sedan. The young couple got in with her and away they went.

And then he saw the truck topple off the planks on the far side. It brought back all the fear. He knew he might be stuck in this damn place until daylight. And daylight would be murder—or punishment for murder. This afternoon the Mexico City papers had probably been loaded with it. God, what a play they'd give it! One of their little tight-pants bullfighters who wouldn't be wagging his cape in the Plaza México any more. The *aficionados* would want to see the murderer slowly flayed and broiled and basted with engine oil.

His hands were sweating. He ignored the way Mooney was looking at him and he turned away and climbed the bank and went as far away from other people as he could get and still stay in the shade, though with the slant of the sun, the shade wasn't as essential as it had been. The way that red ball was dropping, it was going to be night before you knew it.

Bennicke wondered if he was going to be sick. Just one break when you need it, and some featherhead drops his truck into the Rio Conchos.

He crossed his legs and sat like a small muscular Buddha, flexing his fingers, trying to think of something quick and smart and bright. Something out of the bag of tricks. But the bag hung empty.

He watched sourly as Mooney came up the bank. The climb stretched the skirt of the yellow dress tightly, outlining her straight, thick, muscular thighs. Built for it, all right. All slut, and not to his taste, which ran to the restless, leaner, inbred wives of the roaming rich. He saw the pattern of them, of the two of them, as clearly as though he had already spent months with her. She would be the kind to slop around her apartment with tangled hair and crumby robe and busted slippers. Her cooking would come out of cans. And every now and again she would start whining and complaining and he would have to bounce her a little, the heel of the hand against the side of the face, to straighten her out. It made him feel tired to think of what the next few months would be like, even if he could get across the river.

She sat beside him with a heavy sigh. "Nice break, eh, Benson?"

"Thanks. I wouldn't have known if you hadn't told me."

"I've been thinking."

"Good for you."

"Take the chip off your shoulder," she said. She edged a bit closer and lowered her voice. "I've been thinking about your . . . troubles. You said you won't have a car and you'll have to get across the river the hard way. That little car isn't yours, huh?"

He gave her a long, hard look. "What are you dreaming up?"

"I've got the keys to the Buick. I'm supposed to take it across the river. But I can get somebody else to do it, I think."

"What have you got on your mind?"

She edged a little closer. "This guy I'm with. His name is Darby Garon. He's up there sleeping. See him?"

Bennicke looked up the hill, saw the man against a tree on the far side, chin on his chest. "So?"

"I don't know whether to say it because I don't know what you'll go for, Benson."

He saw, on her face, the excitement born of larceny. He knew he wasn't getting any ideas. Maybe she'd have a decent idea.

"I'm just a young fella trying to get along."

"If you get stuffy and tell him about it, I'll say you made it up."

"Keep talking."

"Look, I'm sick of the guy. And he's in a sling. He can't raise hell about anything. He's got a good job and a wife and kids in Houston. He wouldn't dare try to make trouble for me, no matter what I do. When the ferry comes back, all the cars will move down two places, right?"

"If it ever comes back."

"When you have to move your little car down, you can make out like it won't start. You can look under the bood and fool around, and then roll it over out of the way. The ditch is wide and sballow where you're parked. You can make it look good."

He nodded, narrowing his eyes. "I can do that," he said softly, tasting and testing the idea. It was obvious, and it wasn't bad.

"It will be dark then. I can get Darby off, away from the others. I can do that when it's nearly our turn to get across. And you follow us. Can you . . . knock him out without making any noise?"

"That isn't hard."

"He's got the car keys in his pocket, and his wallet is locked in tbe glove compartment. I think he's got about three or four hundred dollars left. I want all of tbat. You get his tourist card and the car papers. They're in the wallet. We tie him up or something, and go across on the ferry, and go right on across the bridge. We can drive right through to San Antone and put the car in a lot somewhere and go to my place."

"I don't look like him, I can't use his card."

"If you have to sneak out of the country, I think it's safer than trying any other way. My card will be O.K., and the car papers will be O.K. I can keep their eyes off you, sugar. And we can sprinkle a few pesos around. It will be late and they'll be tired. On the American side they'll go through the baggage, but they don't ask for any papers. You just have to make a declaration."

He stared down at his knuckles, thinking it over. It wasn't at all bad.

"Let me tbink about it."

She moved closer again. She increased the pressure slowly. "There any other arguments I can use, Del, honey?"

A twist of the wind brought the musky-ripe scent of her swirling full against his face. Desire superimposed itself on weariness.

"Don't try to kid me," he said harshly. "Don't try to make me think you got other reasons. You want that four hundred bucks, and I'm just a way of getting it."

Sbe moved away quickly. Anger flickered and faded. She grinned. "Is that bad?"

"What was wrong with my way?"

"This gets you across the river for sure. And we don't have to meet at that Rancho Grande, and I make sure he doesn't get funny and try to keep all tbat stuff he bought me."

"And I promised to be a ticket for the rent and tbe food and liquor."

"O.K., we understand each other, Del."

"It might work."

"I took a chance, you know. Talking like this to you."

He gave her his jack-o'-lantern smile. "You take no chances. Not you. There's always a guy to hide behind."

"Once there wasn't. That's why I have to be careful."

"Do time for it?"

"Sixty days, but it could have been a one to five. I told Garon I worked in a phone office. That's a large laugh. Anyway, the time I got caught, I was working with a . . . friend. And he went out a window and they didn't get him, and there I was with more damn rolls of coins than you ever saw before. I bet there was eighty rolls of nickels. You should have seen me crying and yelling and saying I didn't know a darn thing about it."

Bennicke pursed his lips. "I don't like tbat. Those guys have a nasty habit of coming around and checking all tbe time, just for the laughs."

"Nuts. That was two years ago and it was over in El Paso. Besides, you said it was just Mexican trouble."

He made his shrug casual. "They might get real stuffy and try to get me extradited. But I doubt it."

"You could be bad news, Benson. I have a hunch."

"Then follow your hunch. Stop snowing in my face. Go and leave me alone."

Sbe hit his knee gently with her fist. "It isn't much of a hunch."

He looked out across the river. "There comes the answer to the Buick problem, anyway. Some guy is rowing her across."

Betty Mooney stood up. She smiled down at him. "Don't go away. I'll go give her the keys back."

Betty Mooney went down the bank. She gave Bennicke an oblique look, back over her shoulder. He saw that her knowledge of his eyes on her altered her walk a bit, put more of an arch in her back, made her slacken the thigh and hip muscles of the supporting leg with each step to increase the tilt and swing of the hefty hips. Watching her walk, he decided that the stay in San Antone might not be too expensive after all.

He knuckled bis thigh. The damn tiredness was making him cross bridges before he came to them. The thing was to get out of this country. Maybe the brazen way was best. Brass it out. Take the Cad across the bridge. He fingered the reassuring bulge of the sweat-damp money belt. Money was your friend. Money and quickness and the bag of tricks.

He straightened out his tough bowed legs and leaned back, fingers laced against the harsh short hair at the back of his head. The sky was deepening.

The hand on his shoulder brought him awake with a start. The sky was black overhead, star-spangled.

"Sugar, your nerves are shot," Betty Mooney said, laughter in her voice.

"Must have been asleep."

"Darby's still sleeping. And I don't wonder. That old boy will sleep for a month to catch up."

He stared across the river. Spotlights had been rigged, somehow. The truck was up on its wheels. Men were hauling at a long rope and he heard the distant chant as they beaved in unison. The truck was inching backward out of the river.

"Progress, eh?"

"The ferry ought to be over pretty soon. And you'll have to do something about your car."

He couldn't seem to come all the way up out of the mists of sleep. His mind was cottony, turgid. He stood up and stretched until he heard his shoulder muscles make small popping sounds.

"Who's singing?" he asked dully.

"Those twin blondes. Sitting up in their car. Tbey gave me something. Here."

His hand closed around the cool bottle glass.

"It's tequila, sugar. Maybe you need some."

He removed the cork, tilted the bottle up. It splashed acidly against his teeth, burned his mouth. He took three gasping swallows, lowered the bottle, and shuddered. It socked hard into his stomach, made a spreading warmth.

He listened to the singing. Funny thing for them to be singing. Church music. Sounded sweet and clear. Gave you the creeps, somehow. Took you way, way back. Combed and brushed and sitting there, and the little shelves with holes for the wineglasses, and the funny taste of the bread as it melted slowly on your tongue. Sun slanting in and that low organ note that made your belly feel hollow every time tbe man bit that exact note.

Bad luck to think about churches.

He tilted the bottle up again. It went down easier.

"Hey, don't be a pig!"

He gave her back tbe bottle. Had to watch it. Empty stomach under that tequila. He braced his feet and stretched again, yawned, scrubbed at his belly with his knuckles.

She slid an arm under bis and ran ber fingers up the nape of his neck. He clamped her waist in his arm, put his mouth down hard on hers, pressing all substance out of it, pressing it into looseness, pulling her in hard against him.

"There's a place," sbe said, her voice sounding dusty and broken.

They stumbled back into the darkness, into the field behind

the tree line. Bennicke glanced to the side and saw, in the starlight, the bullfighter and the barb drawn back, and the metal gleam. With a great cry he threw himself back and away from her, scrabbling crabwise, crying out again, and suddenly the bullfighter was gone from the starlight. He looked at her and saw no barbed shaft protruding, and heard her voice, heavy with contempt, saying, "What the hell is the matter with you?"

He didn't answer. He located the gleaming bottle, set carefully aside out of harm's way. He moved to it, tilted it up, drained what was left.

"What am I supposed to do?" she asked acidly.

"Shut up!"

He threw the empty bottle into the darkness. It thudded and rolled, not breaking. When you started seeing things, you were going nuts. No question about that.

She moved to him, tried with a certain sullenness to excite him. He pushed her roughly away.

"The deal is off, sugar," she said.

"Just get away from me."

"Pardon me for living," she said. She got up and walked away, leaving him.

Tequila rolled thunderously through his blood. He arched his hard thigh muscles and hunched his shoulders. He wanted to hit something, smash something, regain through violence his accustomed feeling of assurance.

After a bit he went down to the river bank, his walk a cocky strut, his elbows held away from his sides. Tequila droned and sang in his ears. The river bank was lighter because of the lights across the river. He saw the half-spick Texan sitting with the pale-headed girl. The Texan's greaser buddy squatted on his heels a half-dozen feet from the couple, perennial cigarette clenched between thumb and middle finger. Flames roared high in Bennicke's brain. He had to do something, anything, to feel alive once more.

He swung his shoe and kicked the Texan's buddy heavily in the ribs, sending him sprawling. Bennicke bounced on his toes, waiting, and said, "Squat around where you don't get in people's way."

The Mexican jumped up and moved away, holding his hurt side. He said something softly to Texas, who had got to his feet.

Texas said gently, "What was the point in that?"

"He gets in my way and next time I kick him in the face."

Figures had moved out of the shadows. Bennicke felt them moving slowly in, converging on him. His mouth suddenly went dry. He suddenly realized he had to make his scrap with Texas, or perhaps feel the white-hot twist of a knife.

He moved with a prancing walk toward Texas, saying, "Maybe you want to get in my way?"

Texas said something quickly in Spanish. Laughter suddenly exploded through the tension, shattering it. The laughter went on and on. Bennicke felt his face burning.

"What kind of a crack was that?" he demanded. "You talk too fast for me."

"I told them they could watch how little fighting roosters are trained for the ring. Mrs. Gerrold, suppose you walk up the road a little piece and keep your back turned."

"I'll stay here, Bill," she said.

Bennicke realized that Danton expected to take him. So he leaped quickly, snatching at Danton's wrists, butting at his face. Danton snapped a hand free, brought his forearm across, chopping Bennicke across the side of the neck with it, moving his body out of the way. Del Bennicke's rush carried him to the side of the truck and he slammed his palms against it to stop himself.

He spun fast, bringing his hands up, but Texas hadn't followed him. He stood, waiting for Bennicke to make the next move, and Bennicke sensed contempt and anger in the tall man. Bennicke put his chin on his chest and went in fast, trying to hook the taller man in the middle. From somewhere out of the night there came a vast, hard-knuckled fist, swung like a bag of rocks on the end of a rope. He saw it a fraction of a second too late—too late to roll with it, much too late to move inside of it. As red lights exploded across the sky, and as the earth tilted up to crash against the back of his head and shoulders, he was filled with anger at his own mistake in judgment, yet also with the release that only violence seemed able to bring him.

When he sat up, Texas was sitting on his heels talking to the girl again. Texas said. "Now tell my friend you're sorry. The one you kicked."

Bennicke found Pepe in the gloom. "Sorry," he grumbled.

"Está bien," Pepe said, and Bennicke heard the laughter behind his words. Bennicke got up slowly, kneading the side of his neck. They all seemed to be waiting for his reaction, looking at him as if he was a damn beetle in a jar. He walked away, up the dark road.

The Mooney girl caught his arm, pulled him away from a nearby car. She was panting as though she had run a long way. Almost like a dog in summer.

"What the hell's wrong with you?"

"Del, oh, my God, Del!" she whispered, holding his arms. "He's . . . dead! And I thought he was asleep!"

He pushed her away. "It's your party. Remember? I'm out of it."

"You're not! You're not! You're going to help me."

"In a pig's. . ."

"Because if you don't, I'll tell everybody here the Mexican cops want you. I'll get somebody to tell them in Matamoros. I'll tell them you stole that car. I'll tell them you're a murderer or something. I'll clobber you good if you don't help me."

"O.K.," he said quickly. He took her up the steep bank, and in the deeper blackness near the trees, he drove his right hand at her throat, caught the softness between thumb and strong fingers. She raked his face once before he pinned her hands. She twisted and they tripped and went down, heavily. She thrashed, half under his weight, and then he sensed her struggling growing weaker. Suddenly he released the pressure, sat a bit apart from her, his head in his arms. She coughed and gagged for a time, then lay still, breathing hard.

In a husky, toneless voice she said, "What made you quit?"

"I don't know."

"They must want you bad, the Mexican cops."

"They do."

"Murder?" she whispered.

"It wasn't, but they'll call it that."

"We're both in bad shape, Del."

It was said in a quiet voice, a voice that held no anger, no surprise.

"How do you know he's dead?"

She took his hand and he felt her shiver. "I went to him. He was making a real funny noise. I couldn't figure it. And then . . . something ran away from him. Something small. It was. . ."

"I'll help," he said, "but not on account of you threatening me. Keep that straight."

"I don't care why as long as you do it."

"We'll do it just like we planned. Only I'll have to get him away from here. I'll have to carry him. I remember from daylight that there's a rock ridge about a quarter mile back and a half mile off the road—same side of the road he's sitting on. I can get him up on my shoulders. We'll drag him back a way so nobody will notice. I'll put him over behind that ridge. It should work. They'll find his car in San Antone. The records will show he came back into the States. I'll strip him, and if nobody finds him before tomorrow night, they'll never know who the hell he was—or even what color he was."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

When he had seen Linda's bright hair in the lowering sunlight, bright against the muddy river, Bill Danton, the tall Texan, had felt a stir of pleasure so quick and so warm that it startled him a bit.

He guessed he had better face up to it and admit, watching the shabby rowboat approach the bank, that she was just too darn close to that picture he had been carting around in his head, of a girl he had never met, of a girl made up of bits and pieces of other girls known wisely and not too well.

He walked down to the bank, pulled the bow of the rowboat up, gave her his hand. She came out of the boat onto the gray cracked bank and told him very calmly that her mother-in-law had died. And suddenly her mouth twisted and her face contorted like the face of a child. He put his arm around her shoulders, walked her away from the line of cars, walked her upstream along the river bank. She took tissue from her purse, and when he began to sense a warning rigidity of her shoulders, he took his arm away quickly. She sniffled at intervals and finally stopped and planted her feet and blew her nose.

"Darn foolishness," she said in a small voice, showing him a red-eyed smile.

"Not at all. It can be a hell of a shock."

"It was, but I don't think I was crying for her. I never really got to know her. We've only been married a few weeks, and she tried to stop us from being married, until she saw she couldn't win, and then she got very sweet about it. She flew down to Mexico City to travel back with us to Rochester. It was a shock because . . . well, she was such a strong personality. In her own quiet way."

They came to a tree that had been brought down in some flood of long ago. The trunk was bleached white by the sun. She sat down on the trunk, her chin resting on her palm, elbow on her knee.

Bill thought of the young husband. Just a kid. This girl had grown up, but he hadn't quite managed it yet. He sat down on the trunk a few feet from her, handed over a cigarette.

"I've got some here, thanks," she said.

"Talking can help, you know. I listen good."

"I don't want to cry on your shoulder, Mr. Danton."

"Bill. And I heard your husband call you Linda. Is it O.K. if I do?"

"Certainly, Bill. This is a crazy day. As if the world had stopped. I feel as though I were dreaming it. The doctor gave me something to take and the world is all fuzzy. If I start talking, I won't stop. I can feel it. And I'll say too much and get a load of remorse later."

"That truth serum they use, isn't that just a sedative? Sodium something. Sodium pentathol."

"How is anybody supposed to know what truth is?"

"Well, I haven't talked metaphysics since a couple of required courses at A. and M., but maybe I can remember just a little. As I remember it, some people claim that truth, as such, is not a constant. It varies with the individual and with the time and the place. Say like what was true yesterday is a damn lie tomorrow."

"Maybe I've hit a place in my life where I've got to change my ideas about truth. Has that ever happened to you?"

"Sure has, Linda. Had to change everything once when I was a kid. My stepmother is a Mexican lady. When I first went to the States to school, I had the damnedest accent you ever heard. Anybody called me a Mexican, I had to go down fighting. Did a lot of fighting, all right. One day I wondered what in the pure hell I was fighting about. Next boy that called me a Mexican, I told him I was. Made me feel better. Made me feel better than fighting, because when I was fighting it was like I was objecting to the label. World is full of people objecting to labels. Washington is full of people calling each other communists."

"Your home is happy, isn't it, Bill? Are you married?"

"No, I live with the folks. What makes you think it's happy?"

"Oh, it's an air people have. I don't know. Sort of secure. When I was little we had a happy home. Dad died and it sort of broke up, and I guess ever since I've been trying to get married so I could re-create life the way it was. My husband's home life wasn't happy. I think I wanted to give him what I had, and what he missed."

"We get along fine. Big stone hacienda sort of place near Mante. Always somebody singing. Always a laugh. We give each other a bad time, but let somebody else try to, and the Dantons unite."

"That's the way it should be."

He frowned. "Maybe it's just *too* good. I've been doing a lot of thinking today. I get restless, but I never get the gumption to pull out and do anything on my own."

She looked down at the gray hard mud near her feet. He looked at her and saw the tears begin to spill out of her eyes again. "Hey, now!" he said softly.

"Imagine a guy lettin' himself get like that!"

"I . . . I can't seem to help it. We're alone. I won't ever see you again. If I can blow off steam, maybe I . . . can stop getting the weeps every minute."

"I told you before. I listen good."

"But this is so personal, damnit." She took more tissue and wiped her eyes. "How is a person to know anything? I fell in love with my husband. As far as I knew. I was in love for keeps, and it couldn't hit harder. Oh, a dream world! With violins and roses, yet. And today I find out that inside he's really sort of a—a little person. I'm trying to talk myself back in love with him, but I can't seem to."

"He's probably upset. Hell, he's just a kid."

She gave him a look of surprising fury. "I like kids. I want to have a lot of my own and raise them. I don't want to bring up somebody else's."

"Maybe this thing today will make him grow up."

"I doubt it. And see where it leaves me, Bill? What do I do now? Go ahead and try to make the best of it, and maybe leave him five years from now after he's taken all the joy out of life? Or quit right now? I have a lot of respect for marriage. I wanted mine to last forever. You start treating marriage like a . . . like a car you can trade in when you get tired of it and it doesn't have much meaning any more. And I can't blame John Carter Gerrold for what he is. It's his mother's fault. Do you want to hear a good definition of a bore? It's one of Dad's definitions."

"Sure."

She spread her arms wide. like a fisherman recalling the one

that got away. She was holding up her two index fingers. She waggled the one on the left hand. "Now, here is what you think you are, see?" She waggled the index finger of the right hand. "And here is what you actually are. If the two things are way apart like this, you get a bore, somebody who can't see himself as others see him. The closer together you bring the two hands, the better sort of person you represent. If you actually are what you think you are, with the fingers right together like this, then the chances are that you're a pretty decent human being. A nice guy. Dad used to say that most of us have just a little divergence, and that if a man didn't have any, maybe he wouldn't have any pride."

"Sounds like your father was a pretty shrewd guy."

"He was. I keep thinking, though, that I can do the same thing to explain to myself what's happened. Over here is what I thought John was. And over here is what he actually is. I had fun fooling myself, all right, but now in one day I've found out what he actually is and I don't like it. I don't want to live with it. Then I wonder if I'm being a perfectionist or something."

"It's hard for me to say, looking at it from the outside, you might say."

"I know why he married me. In my own way, I guess I'm just as tough underneath as his mother was. And he needs to have someone strong. He's got so he depends on strong people. He thinks he's just a little more acute and sensitive and perceptive than anybody else in the world."

"Can he make a living?"

"As a sort of pensioner. His uncle will give him a job. A good job. He won't ever have to worry. I could still go along with the plan. Go back to Rochester with him and buy or build a little house in a very nice section and belong to the Genesee Valley Club and the Rochester Country Club and play a brisk game of backgammon and be that charming young hostess, Mrs. John Gerrold the Second. And now I wonder if in about six months I wouldn't be ready to spit. It would be fine if I could just . . . get back in love with him."

"But you don't think you can, eh?"

She lit another cigarette. The last of the sun was gone. The lighter flame seemed surprisingly bright against the blue-purple dusk.

"Bill, I've always had sort of an instinct about people. And I've never been so wrong as with my husband. Right now I wouldn't want him to—to touch me. It would make me feel creepy. I'm talking too much."

"Like you said, you won't see me again."

She glanced toward him quickly. "No, I won't."

Her words were flat and they seemed to open a small trap door in the bottom of his soul. A world where he wouldn't see her again, ever, suddenly seemed to be a sour place. He told himself he was going too fast. You didn't fall in love in an afternoon. Or fall out of love. That was for the movies.

And he suddenly thought of a way he could say it to her, a way that wouldn't be rude. He spoke at once. "Now look, you're wondering if you can really fall out of love with your husband, just like that." He snapped his fingers.

"I guess that's the question."

"Well, let's get hypothetical, then. Could this happen? That I could see you and talk to you a little bit and then see you coming back across the river and get a feeling in my stomach just like Christmas Eve when I was a kid? Could it be possible for me to think of no place on earth I want to be more than just here sitting and talking to you? Is it possible that right now, the way you sit there, your hair so light in the darkness makes my heart keep turning right over, and keeps drying my mouth up? And makes me feel that you're wasted on a kid like that, and I want you for myself?"

She stood up quickly, facing him, her hands tight on her purse. "No, Bill. That couldn't happen."

He stood up too, stood a step from her, looking down into her eyes. "It can be the truest thing you ever heard of," he said.

"I didn't want you to say that."

"I didn't know I was going to say it until you said that you'd never see me again, and I knew I had to say it quick. You think you're all mixed up. How about me?"

"Bill, this is. . ."

He put his hands on her shoulders, leaned slowly toward her lips. She offered them, and there was just enough light for him to see her eyes close as he kissed her. She broke the kiss by spinning away from him. With her back to him, she laughed. It was a very ugly laugh.

"I must be breaking some kind of record. I've had this dress off once today. I don't want you thinking I'm ready to take it off again. It wrinkles so easily."

He stared at her rigid back. "Honey, you're trying to hurt me, and you're just hurting yourself."

"I've got a new question for myself. How cheap can a girl get?"

"Don't talk that way. It isn't right for you to talk that way."

"How do you know I don't always talk this way?"

"Because I know you, Linda. I know you well, as if I'd been with you for years. Now tell me we won't ever see each other again."

"We won't, my friend. I promise you that."

He took a deep breath. "Maybe we ought to be wandering back to the others."

She turned, smiled. "Thanks, Bill."

They walked slowly back. Floodlights came on on the far side of the river. She said, "I've got to get the car keys back from that Mooney girl."

"No hurry about that. She isn't going anywhere."

He opened the door of the pickup, spread a blanket on the running board for her. He sat on his heels near her. It puzzled him a bit. He hadn't meant to say as much as he did. Once the words started coming, it was as though he couldn't stop them. Not fair to give her another mess to deal with. Let her get one out of the way first. Pepe'd said that kid husband had slugged her one, up in the store. No matter how upset the kid was, there was no excuse for that. Her lips were still a bit swollen. Guess she was using psychology, with that crack about the dress. Trying to scare the guy off.

He remembered when they had walked downstream, a few hours ago. Had a blanket with them. Looked happy enough. Well, newlyweds were maybe expected to do that sort of thing. It made his neck feel hot to think of the two of them on that blanket. Kid husband didn't know what he had. Made him feel jealous, too. Crazy jealous. Wanted to bash somebody.

He said, "I should have kept it to myself."

"It doesn't matter. In a week you won't remember what I look like."

"I won't ever forget what you look like."

"Please."

"I just wanted to set you straight on that, Linda."

"I've probably got the instincts of a tramp. So skip the whole thing."

"You need thinking time. That's what you need. There's a hotel in Matamoros that isn't too bad. You could hole up there and Pepe and I could make a fast trip to Houston. Your tourist card doesn't run out for quite a while, does it?"

"No, but—"

"And then Pepe and I, we could run you down to Mante. Easy day's drive from Matamoros and the pickup doesn't run too bad. The folks would be glad to have you, and there's plenty of room."

"No, I. . ,"

"Let me finish. I promise not to get in your hair. I won't pop off like I did back there on that log. If you get a hankering to go on back to him, why, then you can go right ahead, with no harm done."

"Bill, that's sweet of you, but I should at least stay with John until . . . everything is taken care of. That's only decent."

"Guess you're right about that. But you could come back, couldn't you?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

Pepe was sitting on his heels, politely out of earshot. Bill saw the man named Benson come down the road. He knew from the sway of the cocky walk that the man was drunk. But he was not prepared for the brutal kick, for Pepe's gasp of pain, for the man's crazy belligerence. He saw the other Mexicans drifting toward Benson and knew that the long boredom of the day had bred violence, knew that not long before there had been blood, and a brutal beating. Benson acted a little crazy.

So he made the joke about the fighting rooster and all the others laughed, because Benson's attitude was comically like that of one of the strutting birds.

Bill had fought at college, and later in the Navy. He knew that a good bigger man could readily take care of a good smaller

man. And the brutality of the kick, the philosophy behind it, sickened him. Linda, to his surprise, preferred to stay.

The butting almost caught him off guard. He gave Benson a chance to turn and come back in. He noted, even as he sucked his stomach away from a whistling hook and used the left to set the man up, that Benson knew what he was doing. He had no wish to break his hand, so he hit hard at the solid neck just under the ear. Benson tumbled like a doll thrown by a careless child. Bill Danton sucked bis knuckles for a moment, watching to see if Benson would get up, then went over and sat on his heels where he had been before.

"Why did you want to stay around?" he asked.

"I was going to take off my shoe and hit him with it if he got you down. I never saw anything so dirty mean in my life, the way he kicked Pepe."

"Pepe's just another Mexican," Bill said softly.

She cocked her head on one side. "Don't try any of your tests on me, my friend. I'm one-eighth Cherokee. We Indians are a persecuted minority."

"You know, that's the first time I've really heard you laugh, Linda. Knew just how it was going to sound, too."

"Not again, Bill!"

"Walk up the road with me. I want to talk just a little bit more. It won't hurt you to listen."

"The ferry looks about ready to start back."

"Pepe will put the truck on. You're meeting your husband in San Fernando?"

"No, he's gone on with . . . the body. Maybe by now he's got across the river with her."

"You aren't planning to take that Buick all the way to Matamoros?"

"I'm a big girl now."

He spoke to Pepe. Pepe grinned slyly, bobbed his head.

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him which cantina to stay in in Matamoros and that I was driving you there."

"Now, really, Bill, I'm perfectly capable of. . ."

"There are plenty of places in the States where I wouldn't want to see a pretty girl have car trouble and have to stop and try to flag another car."

"I'll be *perfectly* all right!"

"Even driving up those planks? Pretty narrow."

"Well . . . maybe that might be. . ."

"It's all settled. Come on. Let's see who's singing. Sounds nice."

The blonde twins were in the last car in line. Between songs one of tbem said, "Come on. Anybody can get in. This time another oldie. 'Moonlight Bay.'"

They leaned against the car. Linda sang a clear alto part. The lights strung outside the store touched her face. Bill sang along with the three girls. In the shadow of the car he found Linda's hand. Without interrupting her singing, she tried to pull it away. He held it tightly. And then he saw her smile as she sang, saw her shoulders lift in a tiny shrug. She left her hand in his, curled small. Bill sang in a rusty baritone that he tried to keep as inaudible as possible. There was a magic in the night, and in the old song, and in their voices. Some other tourists joined in, not coming closer, singing at a distance. Magic in having her close to him. Near the end of the song she moved unconsciously closer to him, her shoulder touching his arm. The song ebbed and they all laughed for no reason, and Linda choked off her laughter quickly. He knew that she was remembering the death, and thinking how callous it was to forget so easily.

Headlights went on at the front of the line and they heard motors starting up. The ferry came in and there was no need to shovel at the river bottom to work it close enough. But the planks still had to be used. It took much shouting and advice to get them spaced and blocked to everybody's satisfaction.

Two cars came off the ferry and went up the road, horns bleating, people shouting from the cars and at the cars. They watched the MG drive aboard, and then the pickup truck. The planks and blocks were heaved aboard and the ferry moved slowly off across the river.

"It ought to move faster now," Bill said.

"Release my hand, sir. It ain't fittin'. Not for a married lady."

"Sorry."

"Much obliged."

They walked down the road. Cars were moving down to take up the spaces vacated. The whole line moved. Bill saw that Benson was having trouble with his car. He couldn't seem to get it started.

He stopped and said, "Anything I can do?"

Benson was astonishingly cordial. "Hell, no. Should have had the fuel pump replaced before I tried the trip. Help me ease her out of the way and I'll lock her up. Leave her here and come back *manana* with a replacement, if I can find one."

The car rolled easily on the grade. Benson tucked it in close to the bank, started rolling up the windows. "I guess I was a little crocked when I kicked your pal, Texas."

"You want to watch that. It's a good way to start looking like a pincuchion."

"Yeah. Fool stunt."

"Need a ride?"

"No, I'm all fixed up. That you, Mrs. Gerrold? Didn't see you in the dark. How's your mother-in-law making it?"

"She died, Mr. Benson, just when we got her to the doctor."

"That Mooney girl thought she would. Sorry to hear it. Say, here's the keys to the Buick. I was going to move it down for you. Still will, if you want me to. Guess you want the keys back, don't you?"

"Please."

He got out of the car, handed them to her, turned, and locked the doors of the Humber.

Bill and Linda walked to the Buick. Bill moved it down two spaces. Linda said, "Who's been talking to friend Benson? Dale Carnegie?"

"It's a little fishy, I think."

"What do you mean?"

"I know the type. They get sweet as pie just before they pull something raw."

"Then be careful of him, dear. What am I *saying*? Dear, indeed."

"You don't know how good it sounded."

"I wonder who he's riding with, Bill."

"With tbe Mooney girl, I'll give odds. And tbe Mooney girl's over-age boy friend. You know, he seemed very relieved that you'd take the keys back. Almost too happy about it. And I never saw anybody get taken sober so fast. Want to sing some more?"

"Let's!" Then she sighed. "But I shouldn't. It doesn't look right."

"I don't think it matters too much."

"But no hand-holding, huh?"

"If you insist."

They walked toward the music, through the night magic. I, William, take thee, Linda. Rough, maybe, to be a second husband. Second in line. Maybe, after a bad marriage, you did better. He knew they would have met, sooner or later, somehow. And just a few weeks too late. Bless her. Take time, but sooner or later she would know, and it would hit her as hard as it had hit him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Betty Mooney stood in the shallow ditch below the bank, a big frightened girl in a wilted yellow dress. She was horribly conscious of the body ten feet behind her, rigid in the tree shadows. God, what a desperate, miserable mess!

Del Benson had gone to get his car out of the way, leaving her with . . . it. Gee, he had seemed like such a cute, cute little guy with those big shoulders and the toughie face and that black bristly hair she wanted to feel of. A nice way to unhook from that stupe, Darby Garon. Darby Garon was gone. And the thing up on the bank had a new, evil sort of life for her.

Never liked bodies. Some people seem to be able to take them or leave them. Like undertakers.

That Darby was a funny guy. Half the time I had to pretend I understood what he was talking about. He was a real beaver, and then all of a sudden he goes flat. Damn it, if this gets out, even if I didn't have anything to do with it, it means cops, and cops mean checking back on that old record, and it means trouble, and with a character tbat important, I'll get a year and a day just for laughs. One year of starch and laundry work will turn me into a glamour-puss for sure.

It's got to be that Benson. He's got to get me out of it. And his trouble is bad. It's got him a little nuts. He jumped away like

I was about to burn him. And I wanted it, too. More than any time I can remember. He's such a cute muscley little character. He knows I can fix him good. He damn near fixed me, too. Still hurts where he grabbed my throat.

Why doesn't he come back? If I bave to stand here thinking of that thing behind me, I'm going to start screaming. He's got to get me out of this. We'll have to take a chance at the bridge. I won't drive that Cad across. Not in a million years. I'll walk and I'll leave the twelve hundred bucks' worth of clothes and things.

She jumped violently as he came up beside her. "Give me some warning, will you?"

"Shut up. I gave the keys back to the girl. That ferry is working good now. I rolled the Cad down to where it belongs. We got to do it between ferry trips."

"Del, I'm scared. I'm scared green."

"Stay right where you are. I'm going to drag him back a ways, and if anybody moves too close, cough loud. When I'm ready for you, I'll whistle. Good thing they're singing. Covers up the noise."

He moved away up the bank, walking quietly. She stood with her elbows in her palms, shoulders hunched. Dear God, I didn't mean anything like this to happen. Maybe I've been a tramp, but I haven't really hurt anybody. They all want it, and it doesn't do any harm, and this one wanted it more than anybody else. And he didn't care if I went out and bought the clothes. It didn't make any difference to him. He'd stopped thinking about money or about anything else except doing it, like he'd gone a little crazy or something, and then he started to think of the money, and in his sleep he kept saying Moira, Moira. That must be his wife. And those kind are the worst, maybe, the ones who never take a little cheat, and then get it all wound up inside them, the kind that take money out of banks and run away. I didn't, mean to hurt anybody, even that Moira I've never met, and if I can just get out of this, just get clear of it, maybe things will be different Maybe way back I was wrong, and what I should have is kids and one guy, and it could still be that way because I've never been sick and I could have kids.

But it could be a dirty trick on the guy because you get used to thinking about different ones, and I could go right back to the same old thing.

Seeing dead ones make you think of being dead and bow you will look and what people will say about you. I don't ever want to die. I want to keep living until they find something you can take so you won't die.

She heard the soft whistle. She turned obediently and went up the bank. She couldn't see Benson. He whistled again and she followed the sound. He'd dragged the body back about fifty feet from the tree. The starlight seemed brighter back beyond the roadside line of trees. Darby Garon was on his side, his knees pulled up.

"Once I get him on my shoulders I can carry him. You got to help me get him up there."

"I won't touch him."

"You got to or I won't help you. I'll tell you what to do."

He lifted the body into a semi-upright position, stooped and dug his shoulder into the stomach, and said, "Now, I want him to fall forward across my shoulders. Don't let him slip off."

She tried to help. She pushed her palms straight out in front of her. She recoiled from the touch and the body slipped and fell. Benson cursed her.

He tried again. This time she managed to support the body as he grunted up to his feet. The body lay face down across his shoulders. Benson had one arm locked around a leg, the two wrists held in the other hand.

There was strain in his voice as he said, "Now walk slow in front of me and let me know if anything's in the way."

She could hear the singing. "The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea." Benson stumbled and cursed. He said, "Keep off to the right. Aim for that ridge of rocks over there. See it?"

The very faint light in the western sky outlined the ridge. She rubbed the palms of her hands down her thighs. She had touched a body with those hands.

Benson walked heavily, not speaking. Once he grunted, "Off to the right more so we come around behind it."

"Tbere's a big stone here, Del."

They circled the ridge. Her eyes were used to the night and she saw a sheltered sandy place. "Is this all right?" she asked, turning to look at him. He lifted his head a bit and looked around. He turned around and took a couple of cautious backward steps, tben straightened, releasing the body. It fell from his shoulders onto the sand, landing flat on its back. Benson ground at the small of his back with his fists. He knelt, pulled off the shoes and socks, pulled off the sborts, ripped the shirt off. He emptied the pockets of the shorts into his own. Sbe heard the jangle of the car keys. She wanted to turn away from the body. It lay pale in the starlight, with blackness around the belly.

Benson balled up the clothes and set them aside. He knelt beside the body and the sudden flare of the lighter flame startled her. Black turned to brown-red.

"A bullet in the gut!" Benson said, wonderingly. He snapped out the light. Her night vision was gone. She stood in an impenetrable blackness.

"Honey pie, you wouldn't have shot your old daddy, would you!"

"No!" she cried. "No!"

"Wait a minute! The angle would be right. What do you know! That shot that Texas ducked. Went right up the slope of the road and into this guy. I don't get it. Hell, he could have rolled down the bank or something, or yelled to get attention. It didn't kill him when it hit him. So he just sat there and died."

"Del! Then we can say how it happened! We can tell people!"

"Don't be more of a damn fool than you can help. You think that big shot is going to step up and say one of his men fired the shot? You think you're going to get any backing from the people around here? You better treat it just as if you'd shot him, honey. Let's get away from him."

They walked back toward the glow of lights. He stopped by a big rock. He dropped the bundle of clothes. "Wait here a minute."

She waited. He wasn't gone long. "What did you do?" she asked.

"Wrist watch." He grabbed the edge of the big rock. She heard the crackle of muscles and the rock shifted. He dropped to his knees, and, digging the way a dog does, scooped out a hole. He jammed the clothes into the hole, covered it over, shifted the rock back, dusted his hands, gave a satisfied grunt.

With each thing he did she found she was becoming more dependent on him. He was using his head, making the decisions. They reached the top of the bank. Car motors were starting up again. The ferry, lanterns burning aboard, slid toward shore.

"They'll find him," she said. "They'll find him."

"Sure they will, boney. Something will find him tonight, and some other things will find him in the morning, and the ants will finish the job."

"Don't," she said faintly.

"You got to ride your luck, ride all the luck you can get. Here's what we do: We take the Cad to San Antone. Maybe somebody knows the two of you and saw you together. So we check you out of your apartment and we keep the Cad one more day. We'll leave it in a lot somewbere and tear up the ticket. Maybe in Corpus Christi. We buy a heap and head east. Once we both get clear, we can talk about where and when we split up."

"But first we got to get across that bridge into Brownsville," she said dully.

He drove the hard heel of his hand against the side of her head. She nearly fell. "What was that for?" she demanded angrily. "That hurt!"

"The next time you talk like the roof was falling in, you get it again."

"And nobody pushes me around, Benson."

He hit her again, harder than before. He said, "O.K. make a stink. Go complain to people. Go ahead."

She cursed him. He hitched up his pants and took a quick step toward her, and she could see, in the car lights, the faint gleam of his grin, the narrowness of his eyes. She backed away quickly. "No, don't! Don't do it again!"

"Say you're sorry."

"I'm sorry, Del."

"From now on you do everything I tell you to do, and you do it exactly the way I want it done." He reached out and his hand closed hard on her breast.

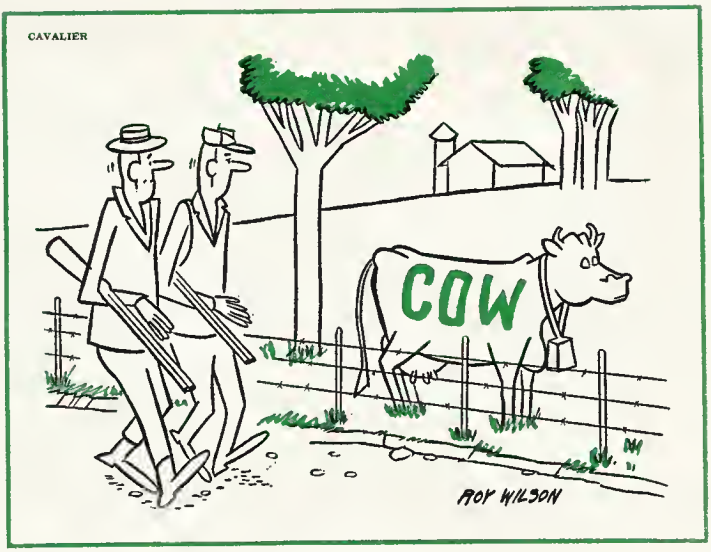
"Don't, Del. My God!"

"We've got to keep straight."

"Let go of me. You'll give me a cancer. You're crazy or something. Ow!"

"We get it understood right now."

She started to cry, helplessly, hopelessly. He released her. She backed away, leaned against a tree. He had turned away from her with sudden indifference. She continued to weep, silently. In a matter of a few moments, he had broken into a secret, independent part of her, had taken away something that had been hers. That hard core of independence. Men had tried to tie her to them with gifts, with persuasion, with protestations of love. Pain had worked where other methods had failed. Pain and humiliation. She felt as though she had become property, had become owned by this cocky little heavy-shouldered man with the face that looked as though you couldn't hurt it with a hammer. She knew that she would go with him, and that he would hurt her again, out of irritation, or anger, or indifference, or just to amuse himself. And she would take it, and stay around for more. She wept for herself, and for the lost years.



He's quick and he's as strong as a little bull, and somehow he's got me. There's something crazy in him, something all twisted, and it must be the same with me or I'd walk out right now when there's time. Walk out, or else ride with him to the bridge and say to the American customs, "This man here is wanted for murder in Mexico."

What's happened to me? This noon we were driving along the road, and I was thinking about all the things I bought, going over them all in my mind. And because a stinking little ferry keeps getting stuck in the mud, Darby is dead. He didn't call for help because he wanted to die. I know that. He waited for it. Darby's dead and I'm with this crazy little guy and I'll never be free of him again, never as long as I live. I want him, and I want him now. Here. And that's filthy, with Darby back there where we took him. That singing is driving me nuts. We've got to get across the river. We've got to run, run. I'll do what he says. He knows what he's doing. He's been in trouble before. God, what is happening to me?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

John Carter Gerrold, stunned by the death of his mother, walked with long strides down the road, walked back toward the river. Without glasses, his eyes saw all the night lights haloed by astigmatic mist. He felt completely drained, exhausted.

Mamma would be kept there in San Fernando, and he had the undertaker's card, and he would have to go to Brownsville and make the necessary arrangements with a Brownsville undertaker to send for the body and fix up her papers at the border. Mamma had always liked things done efficiently and just so, and this sort of thing would have driven her crazy.

He would think that he was over all the crying, and then a harsh sob would come out his throat and it would start again. Mamma, painted up like a clown, had brought him right to the threshold of hysteria. That stupid grinning doctor had tried to make him take a powder, but he wasn't going to take anything when he didn't know what on earth it was. They could drug you and take all your money, and take Mamma's rings out of your pocket.

It was Linda who had insisted on his crazy Mexican trip, and it was the trip that had killed Mamma. Mamma had offered that perfectly good camp on the lake, just outside the Rochester city limits. It was familiar and pleasant. He had learned to swim out in front of the camp. The old desk upstairs was still cluttered with the things he had as a kid, the things that Mamma had said she'd save for her grandchildren.

She'd never see a grandchild. And if Linda got pregnant because of what they did while Mamma was dying, he hoped the baby would be born dead. And she could die having it. It would be justice, certainly.

Linda and all her cute ways. Mamma was right, way back in the beginning.

"Now, John, I know how taken you are with this . . . girl. She's as pretty as a picture. But, darling, you know she's been working in New York as a model, and those girls are not always . . . too virtuous. You can talk freely to Mother, dear. I'm not a mid-Victorian type and you know it. Have you had intercourse with this girl?"

He remembered how shocked and angry he had been.

"Now, John, listen to Mother, and don't get so upset. I have the feeling that this is just an infatuation. You know it would be a very *good* marriage for her. She won't sleep with you because she is clever enough to know that if she did, then you might back out of this marriage."

"Mother, please! You're making it sound so . . . devious and dirty."

"I'm not implying anything of the sort. I just want to make absolutely certain that my boy isn't being too impulsive about this pretty little model."

"I'm going to marry her, no matter what you say or what you do."

Mamma had been right. So terribly right about the whole thing. And Linda had fooled him, right along. Laughed at him behind his back. That wedding-night business had obviously been just so much acting. Because certainly no virgin was suddenly going to begin acting the way she did in bed. It was easy to see that little Linda had been having herself a time, probably for years. All that funny talk about nothing being wrong when you were truly in love was just a feeble excuse for dirtiness. She was sex-crazy and Mamma had seen it and tried to tell him, and he had been too stubborn and too blind to see that Mamma was right, as usual. Linda had got what she wanted, a marriage that gave her the social position she didn't have. And if Mamma hadn't died like this, she might have got away with it. But now it was easy to see things clearly. She killed Mamma just as though she'd used a knife. She hated Mamma. You could see that the way she was trying to get him to go see his father. She wanted to go out there because she must have guessed that the woman Dad ran off with would be a kindred spirit. She and Linda would do well together.

I'm not going to let her get away with it, he thought. After this, I can't live with her. I couldn't touch her.

Mamma was clean and good and decent. That's why Linda couldn't stand her. She tried to hide it, but I could see it. Trying to make me think that Mamma hadn't done the right things, raising me the way she did.

I thought it was a face like an angel would have. Someday I'll be able to forget the filth and the craziness, but I'll never

forget this day. Mamma was brave. She was accepting the marriage and trying to make me happy. She told us all about the little house she had looked at, just two blocks from our house. And Linda had been so funny and cold about it. No capacity for gratitude.

As far as I'm concerned, she can stay right here. She seems to love Mexico so much. Dotty Kale came here for her divorce. I won't marry again. I'll keep the big house just as it was. It will be a memorial for Mamma. There'll be all the books and the records and the garden. Somebody could come in to help share the expense. Maybe Tommy Gill could give up his apartment and move in. We've always had such fun together. And he's so clean-looking.

It will be good to be rid of her. Odd, how she is. When you see her standing at a distance, in the daylight, she has the clean dry look of an etching. But oh, in the tumbly night she's a dark and fleshy thing. The waist that looks by daylight as though it could be spanned with my two hands turns to a massive warmth. Buttocks and breasts swell overpoweringly thick and soft, heated and smothering, and she's at me like some animal, and there is no more cleanness in her, no crispness, no dryness, and while the cloying feeling of disgust at the vast softness of her sickens my mind, my animal body works at her, like some blind thing, until dirtiness is exploded within her and nothing is left but the sticky disgust, the unbearable desire to get away from her, but that's when she wants to be held, and wants to hear the tender words that can be parroted even while they're acid in my mouth.

The statue was cold and clean in the midnight garden moonlight, and the cold breast was hard and good against my cheek, the loins like ivory.

He squinted across the river and saw that fewer cars than he expected had been brought across. The ferry was on his side and the planks had just been put in place. He moved aside to let the cars go by.

He went up one of the planks on the ferry deck and moved to the front of the craft. The lead cars in line had their lights on, and the lights made silver of the muddy river. Cars came on behind him and he didn't turn. He watched the far bank come steadily closer. The time to say it was now. Take her aside, in the darkness, and tell her she was filth, that she was a murderess, that she was dirty-minded. Say it coldly, as Mamma would say it. And then it would be all over, and there would be no more pretending.

She had been a temporary insanity. A craziness that had cost Mamma her life. He remembered striking her. Remembered it with satisfaction. She had been laughing inside herself, thinking of how she had won over Mamma. He'd broken the lying mouth on her, shaming her properly in front of the others, who weren't properly aware of the way she was gloating.

He stood straight, weak eyes searching the night shore for the pallor of her hair, the slightly darker texture of the tan linen dress. He thought he could make out the Buick back in the line, but he could see no one near it and the lights were off. As soon as the first plank was in place, unblocked, he walked down it, ignoring the incomprehensible complaints of the workmen. The first four cars were gone, and that would mean the man named Danton was gone, in his pickup truck. He was glad Danton was gone. The gun-bearing guards had dealt almost contemptuously with him, but Danton had given them trouble, had raised his voice boldly to the fat toad.

John walked up the road to the Buick and looked inside. She wasn't there. The two cars came off the ferry and the two lead cars took their places aboard. He felt for the keys and they were not there. Motors were starting up and down the line, ready to move forward to the vacated places. John got in the car and got behind the wheel. Linda would see the cars move and she'd be along with the keys. There was a faint odor of sickness in the car. The sun heat had left the metal so that it was just enough less than body temperature to feel faintly cool to his touch.

And, in the unmoving air within the car, he could detect Linda's perfume. In the beginning it had pleased him. A light, flowery fragrance. But he had learned to detect the rotten ripeness beneath the fragrance, the musk of decay.

He heard her then, heard her light fond laugh, and it was like a blow across his heart. How could she laugh? A man laughed with her, his voice deep and slow, and then, incredible thing, they sang together. "And I'll be in Scotland afore ye. But me and my true love. . ."

The sick anger propelled him out of the car. He whirled, facing them, slamming the car door hard behind him, ending their song with its explosive note.

"Are you happy, Linda?" he shouted, his voice rising thin and high. "Are you real happy, darling?"

"John, what are you doing here?"

"What are you doing? That's a better question. Who is that with you? Danton? Isn't she fun, Danton? Isn't she a dream?"

"Easy, boy, easy," Danton said in his low, slow voice.

"That's a good word for her too. Easy."

"John! Lower your voice."

"No, I'd rather sing to show you how happy I am. Sing with me, Linda. Are there any words to the Funeral March?"

"John, I know you're upset, but don't make a stupid scene."

"I couldn't take her to Brownsville tonight. The undertaker in Brownsville will have to arrange to have her brought across the border. What do you care whether I make a scene? You obviously don't give a damn one way or the other. You couldn't stand being without a man for a few hours."

Linda started to cry. John watched her, feeling a good satisfaction. Tears like that were obviously faked.

"Give her a break, Gerrold," Danton said. "She was pretty blue. I was trying to cheer her up a bit."

"Obviously."

"You left her to drive the car to Matamoros. That's no job for a girl. I didn't think she could get it up those planks."

"She's an expert driver, Danton. You're just gullible. Why don't you leave us alone? This is a husband-and-wife quarrel. You're not wanted."

"Guess I'll just sort of listen in, if it's O.K. with Linda."

"Then listen and be damned to you. Linda, you can stop pretending to cry now. You haven't got enough heart to be the crying type."

"Please, oh, please," she said.

"You just happened to get caught sooner than you expected. If we stayed together I'd have caught you at it sooner or later. You know that as well as I do."

He saw her head lift. He could see her shadowed eyes. A car behind the Buick honked impatiently. John Gerrold ignored it.

"What are you trying to say?" she asked.

"I'm through. I don't care where you go or what you do after this." His voice broke on the last words. He took a deep breath. "You can get a divorce any way you want it. If there's a child, you can have it and I'll contribute to its support. But I don't want you around me. Mamma had to die to open my eyes to how cheap and common you are. I think she'd be glad to know I'm doing this. You can keep the things I've given you, and I'll finance the divorce."

She rubbed at tears with the back of her hand, with two quick gestures. "Are you quite certain you know what you're saying, John? When did you decide that? After you saw me with Mr. Danton?"

"Don't flatter yourself that much, my dear. I decided it on the other side of the river. I was going to break it to you a bit more easily, that's all. You two gave me the excuse to be blunt. I'm thankful for that. It saves time. Well, Linda?"

Astonishingly, Danton chuckled.

"This amuses you, Danton?"

"In a way, I guess you could say it does."

"You have a funny sense of humor."

"Oh, he has!" Linda said. "He's a perfect riot. He'll have you rolling on the ground."

The car honked again. John got in and moved the Buick down. He got out of the car again. Danton said, "You need any help with the arrangements you have to make?"

"I can manage."

"You'll have to take Mr. Danton to Matamoros, John. His friend is waiting for him there."

"I'll take both of you there. It doesn't matter one way or the other."

He decided that he had hit exactly the right note of indifference. They didn't seem to be as uneasy as he would have liked.

She said softly, "It will seem odd to get a divorce when all the time you weren't married to me. You were married to your mother."

"She knew what you were the moment she saw you. She told me and I wouldn't believe her. She said you. . ."

"Better take it a little easy, Gerrold," Danton said in his soft way.

"So it's all right if the nastiness comes out of her mouth. It's all right if she says lewd things. But when I. . ."

"You just gave up your claim, Gerrold. I'm staking one."

"Didn't take long, I see," John said. "How many before me and how many after you, Danton? She's a. . ."

"You keep talking and you're going to say something you'll wish you'd never thought of."

"Both of you, stop it," Linda said. "I won't be squabbled over like—like some sort of floozy. I'll get the divorce, John, if that's what you want. Yesterday it would have mattered a great deal. Today it doesn't seem important."

"Little walk won't hurt you, Linda. Little airing."

John watched them walk away, silhouetted against the car lights, and his wife was small beside the tall Danton. It gave him, for just a moment, a curious sense of loss. He tried to shrug it off.

He got back into the car and folded his arms across the top of the steering wheel, rested his forehead on his arms. "I did what you'd want me to do," he said. And he waited a moment and the tears came. "All alone," he said, and the tears came faster, channeling beside his nose, wetsalting his lips.

Such a damnable waste. Mamma was in her prime, really. Everybody respected her. We were such good pals. Just last year, coming home from school for vacation, and then having dinner, and Pauline in the kitchen clearing up afterward, and the way Mamma would give me that sly look across the room and without a word I'd set up the table and get the cards and the Russian-bank game would be on.

On other nights, just listening to the records. Or reading to each other. If it wasn't for Linda it could still have been that way. And then coming into my bedroom, tucking me in as though I were a little kid.

She told me a lot of things. She never told me what a dirtiness marriage is. How it humiliates your body.

I can go back there alone and I can make myself well and whole again. I've got to get over Linda the way you get over an illness. And the house will be so desperately empty. There's no good reason for Tommy to keep that sleezy little apartment. I can make it very inexpensive for him. That school certainly can't pay him very well.

Tommy will know what I mean. He's the one I'll tell it all to. Every bit of it.

His chin touched the horn ring and the horn blatted, shocking him with the noise. He slouched in the seat, resting his head on the back of the seat. The day had bitten deeply into his reserve strength.

If he could take just a short nap, between ferry trips, it would help a lot. Mamma always said the way to relax and go to sleep quickly is to think of something beautiful.

He thought of a moonlit garden at night, and a statue gleaming white in the moonlight. He could see it from the porch door of his uncle's house. And he walked out, the dew cold against his bare feet.

There in the car, with his eyes closed, he could see the statue across the years. He moved closer to it. Now he was actually in the garden. He walked up to it, and it seemed as though he had never really looked at it before. Uncle was silly, calling it Diana, and calling it a girl. Anybody could see it was the marble statue of a young, clean-limbed boy. Flat white symmetry of chest, and the careful interweaving of the muscles of the flanks. He stood in the dream garden and the statue turned, bright and shocking and beautiful in its nakedness, pure in its perfect maleness. It stepped down from the pedestal and it held out its hand and he saw at once that it was Tommy, as he had known it would be. And he touched the firm cool hand, and Tommy spoke, calling him Linda. He tried to pull his hand away, protesting, but Tommy held it tightly, and he was Linda and John all at once, and he tilted his face upward.

"Sorry, Gerrold," Danton said, jogging his elbow. "We'll be second car on this load."

John struggled up out of sleep, and the knowledge that Mamma was dead fell in on him, like the crashing of a tall white room. He sobbed aloud.

"Move over, boy," Danton said gently. "I'll run it aboard."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Linda walked beside Bill Danton, grateful for his silence, grateful for the understanding that caused his silence. Her tears had dried and the faint night breeze was cool on her shoulders.

"What do they call it?" she said at last. "A swing and a miss, I guess. That's the way I feel."

"Get yourself all readied up to make a big decision, and he makes it for you."

"I ought to feel relieved. I just feel empty."

"He was rough."

"He's not the same John. Not the same as yesterday."

"Linda, he hated you yesterday, and shows it today."

"But he didn't, really. I know he didn't."

"O.K., then it was like something balanced in his mind. A big round boulder on the top of a hill. It was going to roll down one side or the other."

"That makes more sense. I can understand that better, Bill. But what's going to become of him? He needs me."

"Give him a few years if you want to throw yourself away. Anyhow, I don't think you could if you wanted to. That boy is done. He's through."

"And here we are?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Linda."

She stopped and faced him, looking up at him, the hair paler in the starlight than the honeyed tan of her face.

"Bill, I'm not a great brain. I haven't been alive long enough to learn much. But there's a funny kind of knowledge in me. I don't like pat answers."

"I can see what you're trying to say. But maybe this time it does work that way."

"I don't want a rebound job. Neither do you. You'd be a wonderful shoulder to cry on. A nice big wall for my tears. But I can't see myself doing it. No doubt you're a sweet guy, a find, something every girl should have. But I'm a girl with a lot of cat in me. Ever see a hurt cat, Bill?"

"Can't say as I have."

"They go away. They go off by themselves, Bill, and they tend to themselves and the hurt gets better or it kills them. So I'm not going to fall in your arms, though God knows I want to. I don't want to be alone. I wasn't made to be alone. I was made for one man. John doesn't seem to be the one. Maybe you aren't, either. I'm in no condition to even guess about you."

"Let me do all the guessing."

"No. Write out your address and give it to me. I'm going to get a Nevada divorce. And when it's final, I'm going back to New York and use what contacts I still have to get back into modeling work. And once I'm all set, Bill, if I'm still thinking about you and still wondering, I'll write and you come up to my environment where I can get a look at you. I can't see anything clearly here in Mexico. Then there won't be any question of a rebound. And there won't be any strings on me, and maybe I'll have stopped feeling so empty."

She looked at him, waiting for his comment, knowing that this would, in a sense, be a measure of his maturity.

He scuffed the sole of his sandal on the hard surface of the road. "Sure like to kidnap you and take you home and show you off and say, 'See why I waited and see what I found.' But I see what you mean. It would be moving too fast. Got to sweat it out a little. Got to work and pray for it a little. But one thing, Linda. You're it. For me."

"You can't be sure so quickly, Bill."

"Doesn't make much sense, does it? Man goes around trying to make sense of what happens in his heart, he has a pretty hard time, I guess. I'm no kid. All I can say is this: Somewhere in the back of my mind I've been building me a woman. Doing it for years. Everybody does, I guess. Then you come along and you're like you walked out of my own head, like I built you from the ground up. How am I doing?"

"Better."

"I don't expect you to have that same shock of recognition. I just want to be liked. And I'd be low-rating myself if I didn't believe that liking is going to turn to love, if I work at it. I like to hoot and holler and stomp around. I need an earthy woman and a laughing woman and a loving woman. Pretty comes next, and you got that market pretty near cornered, and that's like pure profit."

"I'm not all those things."

"Maybe not. But you'll be them to me, and that's where it counts. So I respectfully submit that your planning needs one other little thing."

"Like what?"

"Like writing me your address as soon as you're divorced and in New York. I won't come roaring right up. I'll give you time. But I want the chance to sell you a bill of goods, whether you want to listen to the salesman or not. And then I won't feel as if you were all the way gone."

"O.K., Bill. I'll do that. That's fair. What if I said I wouldn't?"

He laughed softly. "I've got the license number of the Buick written down. Don't imagine it would be much of a trick to trace you through Gerrold."

"Bill, we won't be able to say good-by in Matamoros. We kissed and I said a silly thing, and it leaves a bad taste. A had kiss to remember me by. Could another one be sort of arranged?"

"You're putting me to a lot of trouble, but maybe I can fix it up."

"I want the kind of kiss that's for luck. A friendly kiss. That's all."

He pulled her over to where the shadows were deep, pulling her lightly by the wrist. She felt his big hands on her shoulders, saw the dark loom of his face over hers, tilted her face up to his. His lips were firm on hers, firm and warm. A short kiss and one that was very sweet. He still held her shoulders and then his fingers bit deep and his lips came down again as he made a small sound in his throat, half groan and half sob. She fought herself for one twisting moment and then returned his kiss with a crazy, unexpected kind of hunger. They parted and she stood, strangely dazed.

"Good-by, Linda," he said.

"Good-by . . . Bill Danton."

"Looks like we'll get across this trip."

"You go to the car. I'll be along in a minute."

"Sure."

He disappeared, heading toward the car. She touched her fingertips to her lips. The kiss had shaken her more than she had let him know. A funny thing for a kiss she thought, in this day and age. Yet her response had been almost instantaneous.

She walked slowly to the car. Bill was behind the wheel, easing the Buick down to the car ahead. John had slid over onto the passenger side of the front seat. She opened the door and got into the back.

Bill said, "Driven this road a hundred times, Gerrold. Glad to drive it if you want me to."

"Go ahead. It doesn't matter."

She could tell by the fussy sound of his voice that he had napped. He always seemed cross and dull when he awakened, as though sleep took him to a place where he spent his dreams on a witness stand, lying to tireless examiners. She thought she had known him, and yet she had not. She had often watched him sleep, looking at him as though to memorize every detail of him. A man of her own. And today she had found out that it was not a man at all, but rather a precocious, clever child, masquerading in the body of a man—willful, petulant, and terribly, terribly bright.

She smiled wryly in the darkness. Her subconscious was taking off with seven-league boots. Marrying her up with Bill without the slightest qualm. Assuming his willingness to take on the responsibilities of the child, and love it too, merely because it happened to be half hers.

In effect it was like having two husbands sitting side by side in the front seat of the car. Step right up and compare them, folks. Here we have Exhibit A. And this one is Exhibit B. Note the configuration of the skulls, the shape and placing of the features. One is a man and one is an imitation. Can you tell which one is Mr. Famous Man and which one is smiling, popular salesman Jack Peterson from the Bronx? If you guess correctly, we shall send you, without obligation, one slightly worn wife. A little gloss has been rubbed off the edges, and the item is slightly flawed by tear stains, but it is guaranteed to function with all the efficiency you have come to expect from any product of this reliable firm.

As the wheels reached the planks the front end of the car began to lift. She closed her eyes. Life had begun again. Life and movement. And she could sleep, knowing that somehow, someday, that movement would take her to a good place. A good place to be. When you stopped believing that, you stopped believing anything.

EPILOGUE

Manuel Forno, ferryman, could not remember ever having been so tired.

With his legs trembling under him, he trudged up the endless hill to his adobe hut. His good wife Rosalita was waiting.

"You are home!" she said.

"No, indeed, woman. I died of working like a burro. I am a ghost visiting the scenes of a once happy life."

"Now perhaps I can tell you my news?" she said. "Miguel Larra is dead."

It saddened him. "What sort of bull was it? One of Piedras Negras? They are killers."

"No, he was not fighting. He was killed by an American tourist.

"It is said that the murderer is fleeing for the border. Every car leaving Mexico is being examined most carefully, and every *turista* is forced to answer many questions. They know the name of the man, and they have his description. Perhaps the murderer was at the ferry. Perhaps you brought him across today."

"If you wish to dream, kindly go in and go to sleep. It is more fitting," Manuel said.

"Was there a nervous *turista* at the ferry?"

"How can I tell if one is nervous? To me, they are all like dolls with the key in the back. Now I must sleep or die. Tomorrow you can make me deaf with talking. Tonight, woman, I sleep." •

CAVALIER For Men

BONUS IN THE NEXT ISSUE

A Big, Best-Selling Novel

BLACK WINGS HAS MY ANGEL

by Elliott Chaze

Don't miss this exciting, action-packed story:

"Smart guy, that's me, who dreamed the heist for a year—the armored car, the dead guard, the cool green bills, the getaway.

"It was all foolproof, the perfect crime.

"Until I ran into Virginia. Virginia, the socialite call girl who came for one paid hour and stayed.

"Virginia and a hundred grand just couldn't mix."

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